

REDUCING OPIOID HARM



Australian College of
Rural & Remote Medicine
WORLD LEADERS IN RURAL PRACTICE



Joint media release

23 June 2020

Keeping rural Australians opioid safe

With preventable hospitalisations and deaths occurring every day from the misuse of opioids, changes are being made to the way they are prescribed.

Rural peak bodies, the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) are supporting the regulation changes in relation to labelling and pack sizes, saying that opioids can hide symptoms that should be checked by your GP.

Dr John Hall, RDAA President, said that the new, smaller opioid pack sizes are a good thing for patient health and safety.

“Many rural patients have to travel long distances for major surgery or treatment,” Dr Hall said.

“They often return home with a large pack of strong, opioid-based pain killers, which they then proceed to take, not unreasonably, until they are all gone.



“Unfortunately, if pain is persisting beyond what is normally expected, this can delay them seeing their GP or local hospital when they really should be checked for complications.

“Earlier diagnosis and treatment of complications leads to better outcomes and safer care.

“Smaller packs may also assist in the management of chronic pain, as opioids have side effects that need to be monitored by your doctor. This is not just about the risk of addiction, though it is a major concern, but nausea and constipation are also very common.

“These changes have also coincided with prescribing changes under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and this has created some confusion,” Dr Hall said.

“RDAA and ACRRM will work with the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and the Department of Health PBS unit to ensure rural doctors and patients are provided with the latest information on these changes.”

RDAA and ACRRM are also joining with the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) Faculty of Pain Management and providing access to online education to increase the clinical knowledge of rural doctors in relation to pain management.

ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, said that continuing to improve the quality of care provided to rural patients with short-term right through to chronic pain was a critical service.



“Rural doctors recognise the appropriate need to prescribe opioid medication for some patient’s chronic pain management,” Dr McPhee said.

“Rural patients have reduced access to pain management alternate treatments particularly through limited access to allied health services.

“We are excited to be able to offer free access for ACRRM and RDAA members to the ANZCA Faculty of Pain Management *Better Pain Management* online modules.

“These six modules have been updated to reflect the new regulations, and provide an excellent foundation of best practice pain management.

“With the opioid prescribing changes that came into effect on 1 June, in addition to the education modules, ACRRM and RDAA will launch a new webinar series ***Reducing Opioid Harm*** to review the changes and their intent, as well as what this means for rural doctors and their patients.”

The first webinar is on tonight (23 June) at 8pm and participants can register on the ACRRM and RDAA websites.

A high resolution photo of RDAA President, Dr John Hall, is available here:

<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/687>

A high resolution photo of ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, is available here:

<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/968>

Available for interview:

Dr John Hall - RDAA President

Dr Ewen McPhee - ACRRM President

Media contacts (RDAA)

Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890

Ineke Kuiper on 0408 669 638

Media contacts (ACRRM)

Petrina Smith on 0414 820 847

ACRRM National Office on 1800 223 226