

Wednesday, December 21, 2016

Pain experts welcome new codeine restrictions

Australia's top pain medicine body today welcomed the decision to make the drug codeine prescription-only, saying it was based on scientific evidence that low-dose over-the-counter codeine was ineffective and highly addictive.

The Dean of the Faculty of Pain Medicine (FPM), Dr Chris Hayes, said, "This decision by the Therapeutic Goods Administration represents a victory for scientific evidence and community safety. Codeine is converted into morphine and people can easily get addicted to it. This may lead to using high doses of combination products that also contain anti-inflammatory drugs or paracetamol. This can, in turn, cause problems like liver damage, renal failure and even death.

"Other over-the-counter medications, such as paracetamol combined with ibuprofen, provide better pain relief without the risk of codeine addiction. And given that Australians consult a doctor, on average, six times a year, if they really need codeine they will be able to obtain it without incurring extra costs."

Dr Hayes said the long lead time for the change – the new restrictions are due to come into force in February 2018 – would allow patients time to adjust: "There is a year for the transition, so patients can talk with their GPs or pain physicians about how to manage their pain differently."

FPM was one of several organisations that made submissions to the TGA inquiry into the issue. FPM argued that the widespread availability of codeine in pharmacies was a serious public health concern, with rising numbers of people misusing the drug.

FPM had urged the removal of codeine from a schedule 3 classification – where it can be sold over-the-counter in pharmacies – to schedule 4, where it can only be supplied with a doctor's prescription.

About FPM

The Faculty of Pain Medicine is a world-leading professional organisation for pain specialists that sets standards in pain medicine and is responsible for education and training in the discipline in Australia and New Zealand. Pain medicine is multidisciplinary, recognising that the management of severe pain requires the skills of more than one area of medicine.

Chronic pain affects about one in five people in Australia and New Zealand. Specialists also manage acute pain (post-operative, post-trauma, acute episodes of pain in medical conditions) and cancer pain. For more information, please see [here](#).

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