Outpatient Drugs of Addiction Policy

This policy is designed to ensure the correct prescribing of narcotic and benzodiazepines within the community. Narcotics and Benzodiazepines are commonly the drug of choice of people who abuse prescription drugs. These drugs are commonly associated with doctor shopping and multiple prescribers of which the Emergency Department is one source.

People who commonly present requesting drugs of addiction often have plausible excuses and even physical findings to support their requests for drugs making it difficult to justify refusal of the request. They will often present after hours making it difficult to corroborate their story. They may often become abusive and threatening when the request is refused.

In the community, drugs of addiction for greater than two weeks must be issued by one prescriber only and be approved by the HIC and routinely reviewed.

A policy which restricts the prescription and issuing of these drugs to outpatients will reduce the number of presentations requesting drugs of addiction.

It provides a uniform response across the department and can be used by staff to justify the refusal.

It is common in public hospitals that a policy refusing the prescription of drugs of addiction is in force.

There are no circumstances for which prescriptions for drugs of addiction need to be issued from the Emergency Department.

There will be a number of arms to the policy:

1. A sign will be erected outside the Emergency Department stating that drugs of addiction (narcotics, benzodiazepines) will not be prescribed by the Department.

2. An information page/brochure may be given to patients at triage stating that no drugs of addiction will be prescribed.

3. A copy of the policy will be issued to all current staff and to new staff including doctors and Nursing Staff.

The policy should be unambiguous.
Policy Statement

Under no circumstances will prescriptions for narcotics or benzodiazepines be issued by Medical staff of this hospital for outpatient presentations. Medical staff issuing drugs of addiction will be asked to justify their actions to the Senior Staff Specialist in charge at the time or if that is not possible to the Senior Staff Specialist available at the following shift.

In certain circumstances a limited supply of diazepam (5 X 5mg), Temazepam (5 X 10mg) or Panadeine forte (10 tabs) or Oxycodone (5 mg x 5) may be supplied in take home packs available through the Emergency Department. The patient should be directed to see a General Practitioner for further assessment of pain medication thereafter.

It is illegal to provide prescriptions for narcotics and sedatives to known or suspected drug abusers. Medical Officers can be personally held accountable by the NSW Medical Board if they do so. The Prescription Shopper hotline can be contacted on 1800 631 181 if you have suspicions about a patient’s bona fides.

Reviewed by Dr C Gavaghan
Director, Emergency Department
Revised October, 2015.