



Australian College of Nursing

# WHO Global Patient Safety Challenge - Medication Without Harm

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) submission to the Australian  
Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (May 2018)

## ACN response to 'Medication Without Harm' consultation

### General comment

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is pleased to provide feedback on the WHO Global Patient Safety Challenge consultation on Medication Without Harm. As a key national organisation, ACN represents nurses who work in a wide range of health care settings and would be involved in overlooking the supply and administration of medicines, and in some circumstances even in prescribing. ACN recognises that registered nurses (RNs) work collaboratively with individuals, medical practitioners, pharmacists and families, and are well placed to minimise negative effects and optimise therapeutic outcomes for those treated with medicines.

Specific ways ACN has encouraged harm minimisation from high-risk medicines and polypharmacy are detailed below:

- ACN has promoted evidence leading to changes in the supply of specific medicines.
  - Over the counter (OTC) low dose codeine (<30mg) preparations have been rescheduled to 'prescription only medicines', promoting quality use of medicines. Research shows that OTC preparations of low dose codeine offer little to no difference in pain management compared to other non-codeine based medicines (e.g. paracetamol +/- NSAIDs) and that misuse of these products could contribute to unwanted side effects.
  - Antibiotic resistance has been linked to overuse and misuse of antibiotics leading to movements aimed at minimising non-judicious overprescribing.
- ACN has endorsed services and resources promoting quality use of medicines in the community:
  - Home Medicine Reviews
  - Medicines Line (1300 MEDICINE)
  - MedicineWise app to keep track of medicines and access important health information
  - Instructions on how to give children medicines safely to prevent accidental poisoning
  - Promoted MedicineWise smart phone app for consumers to keep track of their medicines
  - Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions (ETP) providing a significant opportunity to strengthen patient safety and confidence in dispensing medication.
- ACN also promotes professional development courses for nurses including :
  - Managing urinary tract infections in aged care
  - Safety through Adverse Event Reporting
  - Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease: navigating inhaled medicines management
  - Asthma: optimising asthma control in children

- Taking a best possible medication history (BPMH)
- National Inpatient Medication Charts (NIMC)
- Medication safety training in the workplace
- Unlocking asthma inhaler technique
- Demystifying bioequivalence

As part of the Choosing Wise initiative (2016), led by NPSMedicineWise, ACN provided five recommendations to eliminate unnecessary practices and improve patient outcomes around medicines. The tests, treatments and procedures ACN recommended<sup>1 2</sup> that nurses and consumers should question included:

- Don't replace peripheral intravenous catheter unless clinically indicated
- Don't restrict the ability of people with diabetes to self-manage blood glucose monitoring unless there is a clinical indication to do so
- Don't routinely administer antipyretics with the sole aim of reducing body temperature in un-distressed children
- Don't use urinary catheters to manage urinary incontinence unless all other appropriate options have proved to be ineffective or to prevent wound infection or skin breakdown
- Don't initiate a plain x-ray for foot and ankle trauma unless the criteria of the Ottawa Ankle Rules are met

ACN has stated that it will continue to work with NPS MedicineWise to advocate for patient needs around the quality use of medicines. Specifically, ACN will continue to:

- Promote and support the integral role of registered nurses in the quality use of medicines through representation on formal committees.
- Work collaboratively with other stakeholders in the matter of implementing initiatives to improve quality use of medicines.
- Stimulate awareness of quality use of medicines by disseminating information to members.

**Regarding ACN's perspective on reducing harm from high risk medicines:**

ACN is a strong advocate for the quality use of medicines. ACN has continuously stated that RNs have the necessary qualifications, knowledge base and clinical understanding to monitor the safe and effective

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.choosingwisely.org.au/recommendations/acn>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.acn.edu.au/publications/media-release/the-australian-college-of-nursing-welcomes-findings-from-the-choosing-wisely-in-australia-2016-report>

administration of medicines and are able to make decisions regarding the withholding of medicines when necessary. The administration of medicines by unqualified staff presents a significant risk to residents and patients' safety. This is of particular concern in the aged care sector (i.e. residential aged care facilities), which is increasingly challenged by poor workforce supply and reliant on non-nursing personnel, or Assistants in Nursing (however titled). ACN continues to demand support for a legislated minimum number of registered nurses (RNs) in residential aged care facilities (RACF). In order to reduce harm from high-risk medicines, an appropriately skilled workforce must be provided across all health care settings, which includes an RN being onsite and available 24/7. Importantly, ACN opposes any proposals that seek to further enable persons, other than registered health professionals, to participate in the administration of medications, as any such change would present a significant risk to the public.

**Regarding ACN's perspective on inadequate monitoring and response to inappropriate polypharmacy:**

The incidence of polypharmacy and adverse effects among older people is well documented and can be attributed to the growing prevalence of chronic/complex disease and co-morbidities associated with physical and cognitive decline. A large proportion of older people are cared for in the aged care sector and nurses in these settings have a duty of care to ensure that medicines are managed wisely and judiciously monitored to achieve the best outcomes for people in their care. RNs can significantly influence the quality use of medicines in aged care facilities and can contribute to the quality of life for residents in this respect. They are qualified in providing regular reviews of prescribed and non-prescribed medicines and detecting alterations in health or physiological status, which may indicate an adverse effect to medicines. Safety benefits to individuals and the community as well as cost savings should therefore not be understated. With regard to medications and patient safety, ACN reinforces that nurses work within their scope of practice and that care delivered within a RACF is always provided under the direct supervision of an RN who can manage the intricate interplay between co-morbidities, polypharmacy and complex care.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.acn.edu.au/publications/media-release/acn-welcomes-oppositions-stance-on-aged-care>