

RGH Pharmacy E-Bulletin

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A joint initiative of the Patient Services Section and the Drug and Therapeutics Information Service of the Pharmacy Department, Repatriation General Hospital, Daw Park, South Australia. The RGH Pharmacy E-Bulletin is distributed in electronic format on a weekly basis, and aims to present concise, factual information on issues of current interest in therapeutics, drug safety and cost-effective use of medications.

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Schedule 8 drugs

The Australian Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Drugs and Poisons broadly defines Schedule 8 (S8) drugs as therapeutic substances that require restriction in terms of their manufacture, supply, distribution, processing and use, so as to reduce the potential for misuse and physical or psychological dependence. Schedule 8 drugs, also known as drugs of dependence, include opioids, such as oxycodone, morphine and fentanyl; stimulants such as dexamphetamine and methylphenidate; sedatives such as flunitrazepam; and the anaesthetic agent ketamine.

In South Australia, the Controlled Substances Act 1984 and the Controlled Substances Regulations 1996 provide a legislative framework for the regulation of the prescription and dispensing of drugs of dependence. The objective of this legislation is to permit the medical use of these drugs while minimising the potential for drug dependence, abuse or diversion.

Under the Act, a prescription for a S8 drug must include the patient's full name, address and date of birth, the name and strength of the drug, complete directions, the prescriber's signature, the date prescribed and the authority number if prescribing in accordance with an authority. In addition the total quantity of drug to be supplied should be stated in both words (prose) and numbers. All prescriptions for Schedule 8 drugs are valid for a maximum of six months from the date of prescribing.

If a patient requires regular treatment with a S8 drug for more than two months, it is necessary for the prescriber to obtain an authority from the Minister. Applications for authority should be in writing, and once granted, the prescriber must prescribe the drug strictly in accordance with the conditions of the authority. Only one authority can be issued for an individual patient: that is, each patient has only one authorised prescriber. This is to ensure that the supply of Schedule 8 drugs is coordinated and the patient does not obtain or attempt to obtain similar drugs or prescriptions from multiple prescribers.

There are circumstances where a prescriber is exempt from the requirement to apply for authority to prescribe S8 drugs. Some of these circumstances include patients who are aged 70 years or more, patients whose life expectancy is less than twelve months, and hospital inpatients where the authorised prescriber is notified. Note that these exemptions do not apply to all S8 drugs, and more detailed information can be obtained by contacting the Drugs of Dependence Unit on 1300 652 584 or online at www.dassa.sa.gov.au

S8 drugs are supplied to patients by pharmacists, who also need to comply with all the requirements of the Act and Regulations. In hospitals, hospital policies and procedures allow all staff, including pharmacists, to comply with legislation. Similar measures exist in the community. Whether in hospital, or in the community, a collaborative relationship should exist between prescribers and pharmacists to ensure that legislation is adhered to and that the use of S8 drugs is monitored to reduce the potential of misuse.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION – CONTACT THE PHARMACY DEPARTMENT ON 82751763 or email: chris.alderman@rgh.sa.gov.au
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