
Circular no 31

To: Managers of Pharmacies in Tasmania

Storage and handling of narcotic substances in community pharmacies.

As pharmacists would be generally aware, changes in indications for medical use of opioids and amphetamine related drugs have resulted in escalating use of these substances. Since 1991, per capita use of morphine base and methadone 10 mg tablets increased more than four fold, oxycodone more than nine fold and dexamphetamine over forty fold. The increased numbers of prescriptions and need to maintain larger stocks of drugs have made it more difficult for pharmacists to store and handle schedule 8 substances in an orderly manner.

It has been suggested that some pharmacists may find it useful to handle large volumes of narcotic drugs by employing a “day safe”. Essentially, this is a locked cupboard or drawer which is used for storage of schedule 8 substances only while the pharmacy is open.

The information below is intended to provide general guidance to pharmacists in regard to storage of this class of drugs.

Storage of schedule 8 substances overnight and when the pharmacy is closed (“night safe”)

Poisons Regulation 24 requires that enclosures for storage of narcotic drugs must meet approved standards. The standard for community pharmacies is level 4 which is as follows:

Level 4

- (a) A substantial torch and drill resistant free-standing floor safe weighing at least 500 kilograms, bolted and glued to a concrete floor.
- (b) An in-floor torch and drill resistant safe, the container and neck being constructed of black mild steel plate and embedded in reinforced concrete of at least 40 megapascal composite strength. The safe will be required to have a substantial closure fitted with a 6 lever key lock or other locking mechanism providing at least equal security, or alternatively a keyless combination lock. The brand and model of safe shall be approved by the Secretary, Department of Health and Human and Health Services.

The following brands and models are currently approved:

- 1. CMI collector in-floor safe with TDR door.
- 2. Abel TDR in-floor safe.
- 3. CMI PR Series.

Should any pharmacist consider that their night safe does not meet this standard, they should contact the Pharmaceutical Services Branch on 6233 2064.

Storage of schedule 8 substances in a “day safe” while the pharmacy is open

- Schedule 8 substances may be transferred from an approved drug safe to a cupboard or drawer (“day safe”) during the hours a pharmacy is open to assist efficient handling.
- The day safe must be capable of being securely locked and must be kept locked when not in use. The key must be retained by the pharmacist so that no other person has access to it.
- No items other than schedule 8 substances or a schedule 8 register may be kept in the day safe.
- Narcotic drugs awaiting collection must be kept in the day safe until they are collected by the patient or agent. It should be noted that opportunistic theft of drugs of dependence has been reported from time to time from storage areas for medicines awaiting collection.
- All medicines in the day safe must be returned to the night safe before the pharmacy is closed each day.

Please contact the Pharmaceutical Services Branch on 6233 2064 should you require more information about this matter.

John Galloway
Chief Pharmacist

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