



National Prescribing Service Limited

MEDIA RELEASE

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What health professionals can do on World Stroke Day

More than 5720 health professionals across Australia have taken the opportunity to participate in National Prescribing Service (NPS) professional development activities focusing on stroke prevention.

Stroke – What can I do? is the theme of World Stroke Day 2009 (29 October) and aims to improve global awareness of stroke prevention and encourage optimal management of stroke patients.

“World Stroke Day is an ideal time for health professionals to participate in the NPS therapeutic program, *Antiplatelet and anticoagulant therapy in stroke prevention*,” NPS senior clinical adviser, Judith Mackson said.

A focus of the therapeutic program is the use of warfarin therapy in reducing the risk of thromboembolic stroke in patients with atrial fibrillation, as well as ways to improve its safe use.

“Warfarin offers enormous benefits in reducing the risk of stroke in patients with atrial fibrillation but it is often underutilised. In a recently published Australian study, the majority of patients with known atrial fibrillation were either not anticoagulated or under-anticoagulated. This concurs with past international findings of inadequate anticoagulation of those at risk of stroke,” Ms Mackson said.

The NPS therapeutic program focuses on:

- Assessing absolute cardiovascular risk to establish which patients would benefit from aspirin in primary prevention of cardiovascular events
- Deciphering the evidence behind aspirin, aspirin plus dipyridamole and clopidogrel to choose the appropriate antiplatelet to prevent recurrent stroke and transient ischaemic attacks (TIA)
- Using scoring of risk factors in patients with atrial fibrillation to stratify stroke risk and decide between warfarin and aspirin
- Assessing risk factors for bleeding in patients with atrial fibrillation before commencing warfarin therapy
- The critical importance of maintaining INR within therapeutic range and educating patients on the safe use of warfarin

“Elements of the program include one-to-one educational visits from NPS Facilitators, peer group discussion and a case study titled *Antithrombotic options in stroke prevention*, developed to help GPs, pharmacists, nurses and other health professionals refine their clinical decision-making skills,” Ms Mackson said.

Health professionals can find more information in *NPS News (62)* which outlines the appropriate use of antiplatelet and anticoagulant therapies in the long term prevention of ischaemic stroke and ways to communicate risks and benefits to patients, and *Prescribing Practice Review (44)* which provides individual prescribing data for GPs and practical independent information.

For more information visit www.nps.org.au/health_professionals, phone (02) 8217 8700 or email info@nps.org.au.

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