



National Prescribing Service Limited

2nd National Pharmacist Survey: Executive Summary

This second survey of pharmacists provides data on five years of educational activity undertaken with pharmacists by the National Prescribing Service Limited (NPS). Specific areas of data collection were pharmacists' knowledge and behaviour around the activities of the NPS, pharmacists knowledge of evidence-based prescribing practices, pharmacists use of different types of information sources, how pharmacists keep up to date with changes in medical practice and pharmacist perceptions about the value of the NPS.

This report details survey methods, analysis and results, and is intended primarily for internal NPS use. NPS will use the report to comment on any changes in pharmacist awareness and perceived value of the organisation, products, activities and services as part of its internal program evaluation. It is also used to examine changes in pharmacist knowledge of evidence-based use of medicines and comment on whether any observed changes are consistent with expectations of specific NPS programs.

NPS will also use the data to help inform program refinement and development. Recommendations recorded in this report are limited to those for NPS as part of program evaluation and, in particular, relating to national pharmacist surveys. Specific recommendations for program refinement and development will be discussed and reviewed with program implementation staff. Informed decisions will then be made by NPS in the light of strategic priorities and budgetary considerations.

Response, respondents and representativeness

- Of the 2 500 surveys mailed, 1 233 (51%) surveys were returned and 1 017 (42%) were included in the analysis.
- The average pharmacist in the survey was a female aged 40–49 and trained in Australia.
- Sixty-six percent of the respondents were community-based pharmacists while 12% were hospital-based, the remainder worked in non-dispensing roles, e.g. pharmaceutical industry, administration, teaching.

High awareness of NPS

- Almost all pharmacists (99%) had heard of the NPS. Although awareness of NPS activities conducted by local divisions of general practice was relatively low (54%), this proportion has more than doubled since the last pharmacist survey in 2002 (25%).
- Around half (49%) were aware of Medication Management Review activities undertaken by divisions of general practice. Those who had participated in NPS activities and those from rural areas were most likely to be aware of NPS activities in divisions of general practice.
- Awareness of established NPS products and services was high:
 - 88% of pharmacists were aware of *NPS News*, of these 93% reported to have read it
 - 84% of pharmacists were aware of *PPRI/Pharmacy Letter*, of these 94% reported to have read it
 - 89% of pharmacists were aware of NPS self-audits for pharmacists, of these 77% reported to have participated in this activity
 - 77% of pharmacists were aware of NPS case studies for pharmacists, of these 82% reported to have participated in this activity

- 19% were aware of small group meetings with pharmacists and GPs, and 13% were aware of small group meetings with pharmacists only.
- Of the newer NPS initiatives for pharmacists, 24% were aware of NPS new drug seminars and 70% were aware of *NPS RADAR*.
- The proportion of pharmacists who correctly identified the NPS as an independent organisation increased from 72% in 2002 to 76% in this survey.

Positive feedback on materials

- The perceived quality and usefulness of all products services and activities provided by NPS was high. Most respondents felt the information they receive from NPS is independent (80%), evidence-based (85%) and appropriate to their needs (78%). All have increased significantly since 2002.
- Three quarters of respondents felt NPS self-audits integrated with both the Quality Care Pharmacy Program and the application of professional practice standards for pharmacist and pharmacy only medicines.

A valuable program

- Importantly, most respondents (97%) rated NPS to be either of 'great' or 'moderate' value. Specifically, self-audits were mentioned as being of most value followed by *NPS News*, *Pharmacy Letter* and case studies. Clinical topics provided by NPS mentioned as being most useful were use of NSAIDs/COX-2, management of osteoporosis and management of gastro-oesophageal reflux disease.
- Most pharmacists (86%) believed that NPS activities supported them in enhancing Quality Use of Medicines (QUM) through their pharmacy practice.

Awareness of NPS consumer programs and other resources

- Almost all pharmacists were aware of Consumer Medicine Information (CMI). Most (87%) were also aware of the consumer campaign "Common colds need common sense". More importantly, 89% of pharmacists who were aware felt that the campaign assisted them in educating patients about managing the symptoms of common colds. Awareness of the "Common colds need common sense" campaign has fallen from 2002 when 95% of pharmacists had heard of it, to 87% in this survey. However, some of this decline may be due to the relative timing of the survey as the campaign is only active in the winter months.
 - 98% of pharmacists were aware of CMI and 98% of these had given it to patients.
 - 87% were aware of the NPS campaign "Common colds need common sense".
 - 85% were aware of *Medimate* and 53% said that they had given it to consumers.
 - 71% were aware of the NPS campaign "Medicines without the mix-ups".
 - 57% were aware of Medicines Line and 43% had referred consumers to it.
- The usefulness of NPS consumer resources were all rated highly with 89% rating Medicines Line 'good' or 'very good', 79% for CMI and 58% for *Medimate*.

Quality use of prescription and over-the-counter medications

- COX-2 selective NSAIDs
In assessing the attitudes towards the adverse effects profile of COX-2 selective NSAIDs and conventional NSAIDs, pharmacists were asked to indicate those effects where COX-2 selective NSAIDs provided an advantage over NSAIDs. Most pharmacists (88%) thought that COX-2 selective NSAIDs had an advantage over NSAIDs in reducing the incidence of gastrointestinal bleeding or perforations. Around half (46%) thought that COX-2 selective NSAIDs provide an advantage over NSAIDs in not causing dyspepsia.

- First-line therapy for allergic rhinitis
Pharmacists were asked how they would manage a patient presenting with moderate symptoms of seasonal hay fever. Around two-thirds of pharmacists (63%) selected a correct option. Those who had not participated in NPS activities, older pharmacists and pharmacists from remote areas were less likely to answer correctly.
- Approach for managing uninvestigated dyspepsia with no other risk factors for serious
Most pharmacists (95%) who answered this question chose correct options. Of those who answered incorrectly, 4.3% said they would refer to a doctor for investigation and 0.6% would refer for a trial of a proton pump inhibitor.
- Dosage of inhaled corticosteroids for asthma
Pharmacists were asked whether certain doses of inhaled corticosteroids were considered high, low or medium for adults; only 8% were able to complete this correctly. Of those who were correct, two thirds had participated in NPS activities.
- Current evidence around hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
Pharmacists were asked to assess several statements about the current evidence around HRT. Most pharmacists (77%) knew that HRT should be reserved for the relief of unpleasant menopause symptoms. They were much less sure about its use in fracture prevention for women aged 65–75 years, only 14% recognised this statement as true. Almost three quarters (73%) erroneously thought that there is a small increase in the risk of breast cancer in women who use combined HRT for more than 1–2 years. Only 23 pharmacists (2%) correctly all identified all the true and false statements.
- Target International Normalized Ratio (INR) for patients with atrial fibrillation treated with warfarin
Pharmacists were asked to identify the correct target range for INR in patients with atrial fibrillation treated with warfarin. Just under two-thirds of pharmacists correctly identified the INR range to be 2.0–3.0, 20% of pharmacists were unsure of the correct range. Younger pharmacists and participants in NPS activities were more likely to answer correctly.
- Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)
Pharmacists were asked to indicate whether they thought that certain statements about NRT were true or false. Most pharmacists (86%) knew that NRT was the preferred first-line therapy for smoking cessation. Similarly, 89% were able to identify that the statement “using nicotine replacement therapy is effective in all smokers” is false. However, only half knew that use of NRT for eight weeks provided a smoking cessation rate as high as periods of longer use. Approximately a third (37%) of those who answered these questions correctly identified all three statements about NRT.
- Management of upper/lower respiratory tract infections and acute sinusitis
Pharmacists were asked several questions about the management of respiratory tract infections and acute sinusitis. Nearly three-quarters (71%) correctly knew acute bronchitis improves in approximately 85% of patients without need for treatment or antibiotics. Similarly, 65% knew that amoxicillin is the antibiotic of first choice for acute sinusitis. A third incorrectly thought that the appearance of coloured sputum with a respiratory tract infection is a reliable indicator of whether an infection is bacterial or viral. Only 11% mistakenly believed that less sedating antihistamines are recommended first-line drugs for managing common cold symptoms in adults.

Improving information exchange with doctors and consumers

- Sixty-five percent of pharmacists agreed that they felt more confident in communicating with doctors as a result of NPS activities and products. A larger proportion (86%) believed that NPS activities had helped them in providing advice to consumers regarding medications.

Sources of therapeutic information

- Less than half (42%) of pharmacists were aware of the NPS Therapeutic Advice and Information Service (TAIS) and of these only 9% reported to use it 'frequently' with a further 45% indicating they use it 'sometimes'. Around 70% of respondents were aware of the new drugs resource Rational Assessment of Drugs and Research (RADAR). This is impressive given that RADAR has been available for less than a year. Of those who were aware of RADAR, 47% indicated that they 'sometimes' or 'frequently' used it.
- The *Australian Pharmaceutical Formulary and Handbook*, *Prescription Products Guide* and the *Australian Medicines Handbook* were reported to be the most used sources of information in the four weeks before the survey. Sixty percent of pharmacists had used information from *Australian Prescriber* in this period.
- Journals (both paper and internet) were ranked highest when pharmacists were asked their favoured options for keeping up to date with changes and advances in medicines. Continuing education events and drug sponsored continuing education events ranked second and third out of 10 possible options. While educational visits from NPS facilitators and similar educators were ranked as the fifth most preferred option.

Suggestions for NPS

- An extensive list of topics was suggested by respondents to help NPS reach the goal of improving the health of Australians through appropriate and cost-effective prescribing.
- The most frequent suggestions were diabetes, complementary medicines, dermatology and mental health (including depression). Suggestions focusing on areas of clinical practice rather than specific morbidities were drug interactions/adverse drug reactions, new drugs and interpreting pathology results.