



National Prescribing Service Limited

MEDIA RELEASE

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Education the key to addressing misuse of diagnostic technologies

The inappropriate use of diagnostic imaging has been recognised as an issue by Government, and in August the National Prescribing Service will begin the first phase of its program to improve referrals for diagnostics.

This program was announced in the last federal budget, with funding of \$9.4 million over four years to improve the use of diagnostic tools including CT scans, pathology and other diagnostic technologies.

The NPS program will focus on improving requests by doctors for pathology and diagnostic tests, and draws on the same successful model it has used over the last decade to improve medicines use.

“Our model for improving medicines use in Australia has been extremely successful. It focuses on both education of health professionals and of consumers, and we are proud to say that we have achieved significant changes in prescribing behaviour. For some medicines this has meant a decrease in prescribing and for others it has meant an increase,” NPS CEO, Dr Lynn Weekes said.

“Our ultimate concern is that medicines and medical technologies are used in the best way possible for the patient’s health.”

The first phase of the NPS program will address technologies used to diagnose lower back pain, as back complaint is the second most common reason why people presented to their doctor asking for analgesics. Back pain generates 5% of imaging orders.

A review of GP activity using the BEACH dataset shows the proportion of encounters generating imaging orders increased from 6.7% in 1999-2000 to 8.5% in 2008-09 (approximately 2.7 million more encounters for which imaging was ordered). Diagnostic radiology accounts for almost half (48.4%) of all imaging ordered in 2008-09.

“One of the difficulties doctors face is that people with lower back pain often expect to be prescribed an x-ray or CT scan in the hope that it will identify the root cause of their pain. In reality, imaging rarely is helpful in guiding the best treatment choices for back pain,” Dr Weekes said.

A diagnostics expert advisory panel has been established and is chaired by Tim Usherwood, Professor of General Practice and Head of Department, Sydney Medical School, Westmead Hospital.

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The National Prescribing Service Limited (NPS) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation for quality use of medicines funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.