

## **Relaxed attitude towards medicines leading to greater health problems**

Australians' blasé attitude towards medicines is leading to further health problems for many people and is placing avoidable pressure on our health system.

An article published in MJA has detailed serious health effects in patients who misused pain killers containing ibuprofen and codeine, and notes more than half a million Australians use combination pain relief products for non-medical purposes.

Because of its opioid effects, codeine can cause dependence with long term use, and this may lead people to increase their dose. When people take combination products containing codeine in higher doses than recommended, they are also taking high doses of the other pain relief ingredients - paracetamol or ibuprofen - and it's these ingredients which, when misused, can cause serious problems such as stomach and liver damage.

Karen Kaye, acting CEO of NPS, an independent organisation that enables people to be medicinewise, says people need to start thinking more seriously about non-prescription medicines.

"Australians are famous for our relaxed, 'she'll be right' attitude. But when it comes to medicines we need to pay more attention to what we're taking and the potential effects they can have on our bodies."

"Just because a medicine can be purchased without a prescription doesn't mean it's risk-free," Ms Kaye said.

The very serious side effects caused by overusing medicines containing paracetamol and ibuprofen are well known and documented. While new laws introduced in May mean people need to see a pharmacist before purchasing pain relief products containing codeine, the message stands for any non-prescription medicine, even some natural and herbal products.

"As a society we have become blasé about non-prescription medicines and assume that anything designed to make us feel well will do just that. This is not always the case," Ms Kaye said.

The best way of avoiding problems caused by inappropriate medicines use is to become medicinewise.

"Ask yourself if you really need to take a medicine, and whether it's the best one for you. Know the active ingredients in the medicines you take. Learn the potential side effects and how to take the medicine properly. And if the medicine isn't working, speak to your doctor or pharmacist about alternate options."

**ENDS**

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