



National Prescribing Service Limited

National GP Survey

June 2008

Executive Summary

This sixth national survey of general practitioners (GPs) undertaken by the National Prescribing Service Limited (NPS) has been carried out after ten years of NPS quality use of medicines (QUM) education to GPs in Australia. The survey has provided data on GPs' knowledge and behaviour around the activities of NPS; GP knowledge of evidence-based prescribing practices; use of different types of information sources; and GP awareness of the various NPS education materials, services and programs. Also included were questions which aimed at enhancing understanding of various aspects of computerised prescribing and GPs' views on generic and complementary medicines.

Response, respondents and representativeness

- Of the 2,108 surveys mailed, 885 (41.9%) were returned and 824 (39.1%) were included in the analysis.
- Male GPs accounted for 59.1% of the respondents and the GPs had a mean age of 51.3 years (range: 28-86; SD: 10.2 years). The mean time in general practice was 21.2 years and 72.9% had undertaken their undergraduate training in Australia. Only 11.0% of the GPs who responded to the survey were from a corporate practice with the remaining 89.0% being from non-corporate group practices.

NPS products & services for health professionals

- The NPS health professional product/resource with the highest awareness was *Australian Prescriber* with 95.4% of GPs aware. Awareness of *NPS RADAR*, *NPS News* and *Prescribing Practice Review* was also high at around 90%. GPs were much less aware of the NPS website and Therapeutic Advice & Information Service (TAIS) with awareness of 48.3% and 35.0% respectively.
- Use of NPS health professional products/resources was, as a rule, also encouraging, perhaps with the exception of TAIS. In particular (in those aware):
 - 34.8% frequently and 63.2% sometimes read *Australian Prescriber*
 - 35.2% frequently and 53.2% sometimes read *NPS RADAR*
 - 37.6% frequently and 58.2% sometimes read the *NPS Prescribing Practice Review*
 - 33.7% frequently and 61.0% sometimes read *NPS News*
 - 7.0% frequently and 60.1% sometimes used the NPS website
 - 4.9% frequently and 37.6% sometimes used TAIS.

- Between 2006 and 2008, there was a significant increase in the number of GPs who were aware of *NPS RADAR* from 89.4% to 92.4%. There was also however a coinciding significant decrease in the use of *NPS RADAR* however from 94.2% to 88.4%.

NPS consumer products and services

- The '*Common Colds Need Common Sense*' campaign was the NPS consumer program most recognised by GPs (68.3%). Awareness of other consumer programs and resources amongst the GPs was mixed and needs to be noted that some of these products (*) are marketed towards consumers and not health professionals.
 - 53.9% were aware of NPS Patient Information Leaflets
 - 32.6% were aware of the *NPS Medicines List*
 - 32.9% were aware of *Medicines Line*
 - 29.6% were aware of *Medimate*
 - 34.4% were aware of *Medicine Update*.
- Between 2006 and 2008, there were significant decreases in the number of GPs who were aware of some consumer products and services:
 - Medicines Line* from 38.7% to 32.9%
 - Medimate* from 36.4% to 29.6%
 - NPS Patient Information Leaflets from 61.4% to 53.9%
 - NPS Medicines List* from 40.3% to 32.6%.

Value of NPS

- Encouragingly, many GPs rated NPS to be great (36.7%) or moderate (53.5%) value. The value of NPS to GPs has grown significantly over the years. In 2000, only 14% of GPs who responded to our survey considered NPS to be great value. In 2006, 35.9% of GPs considered NPS to be of great value and this has slightly increased to 36.7% of GPs as noted above.

External influence on NPS information and activities

Approximately 16% of surveyed GPs thought that NPS information and activities were unduly influenced by government and a further 32.2% considered NPS to be unduly influenced to some extent by government. In 2006, 21.6% of GPs believed NPS to not be influenced by government. This has increased to 26.4% in 2008.

In contrast, only 3.6% thought that the NPS was unduly influenced by the pharmaceutical industry and a further 15.9% considered NPS to be unduly influenced to some extent by the pharmaceutical industry. 49.3% agreed that the pharmaceutical industry did not unduly influence NPS activities, a slight increase from 48.9% in 2006.

Feedback on NPS information and activities

- GPs were very positive in their views on the clinical relevance, evidence-based nature and influence of NPS on their prescribing. In particular, the proportion of GPs that NPS information and activities:
 - are clinically relevant – 65.7% agreed and 21.7% strongly agreed
 - are evidence-based – 59.3% agreed and 22.9% strongly agreed
 - are trustworthy – 58.6% agreed and 23.0% strongly agreed
 - are appropriate to their needs – 59.5% agreed and 16.8% strongly agreed
 - reduce uncertainty on medicines issues – 54.5% agreed and 16.2% strongly agreed
 - influence their prescribing – 53.1% agreed and 16.2% strongly agreed.

Quality use of prescription medicines

- GPs were asked to record what antibiotic they would prescribe as their first choice for a patient presenting for the first time with acute sinusitis. Most GPs (65.2%) correctly indicated that they would use amoxicillin, a decrease from 68% in 2006.
- 51.9% of GPs correctly answered that they would begin insulin immediately when asked if the treatment of a 60-year-old patient who has just been titrated up to a maximal oral antidiabetic drug therapy fails after 2 months to normalize fasting plasma glucose and HbA_{1c} levels.
- GPs were asked whether rosiglitazone (Avandia) and pioglitazone (Actos) are contraindicated in patients with moderate to severe heart failure. 93.4% of GPs answered correctly with an answer of true.

Recent use of sources of therapeutic information

- *MIMS* (80.7%), the *PBS schedule* (62.2%) and *Therapeutic Guidelines* (60.4%) were reported to be the most used paper-based sources of information in the past four weeks. Similarly these products were also ranked highest when GPs were asked about their use of electronic information resources, with 74.1% using electronic *MIMS*, 56.2% the *PBS schedule* in electronic format and 42.5% electronic *Therapeutic Guidelines*.
- *NPS RADAR* in paper format had been read by 29.7% of GPs in the previous four weeks but the electronic format by only 11.8% (note that the question did not differentiate between *RADAR* in prescribing software and that available on the internet). The paper version of *Australian Prescriber* was read by 40.9% GPs but only 7.4% had used the web-based version.

Computer use for prescribing

- The majority (92.5%) of GPs in the survey used a computer for prescribing.
- The most commonly used prescribing software was *Medical Director 3* (38.9%) followed by *Medical Director 2* (30.1%) and then *Medtech* (6.6%).
- Of those GPs who use *Genie*, *Medical Director 2*, *Medical Director 3* or *Plexus*, 32.8% were aware that *NPS RADAR* is available in their prescribing software.

GPs' views on complementary, over-the-counter (OTC) and generic medicines

- Most GPs (80.2%) agreed that it was important to ask patients if they were taking complementary medicines while a further 18.4% agreed that it was to some extent important.
- GPs were similarly divided on how often they asked about OTC medicines. The overwhelming majority (84.4%) however agreed that it was important to ask patients if they were taking OTC medicines while a further 15.2% agreed that it was to some extent important.
- Over one fifth of GPs (21.1%) either agreed or strongly agreed that generic medicines are not always as effective as branded medicines. A further 30.8% of GPs neither agreed nor disagreed.

- 57.4% of GPs noted that in the last 6 months that there had been no change in the number of patients asking about generic medicines. A further 26.2% of GPs indicated that in the last 6 months that there had been an increase to some extent in the number of patients.