



National Prescribing Service Limited

National Pharmacist Survey

June 2008

Executive summary

This fourth national survey of pharmacists undertaken by the National Prescribing Service Limited (NPS) has been carried out after nine years of NPS quality use of medicines (QUM) education to pharmacists in Australia. The survey has provided data on pharmacists' knowledge and behaviour around the activities of NPS; knowledge of evidence-based medicine practice; use of different types of medicine information sources; and awareness of the various NPS education materials, services and programs. Also included were questions which aimed at enhancing understanding of various aspects of pharmacy practice audits, and pharmacists' views on generic, other-the-counter and complementary medicines.

Response and respondents

- In total 1746 surveys were mailed and of these, 746 (43.6%) were returned.
- There were 512 (29.3%) surveys included in the analysis. Surveys that were excluded from the analysis were done so on the basis that these respondents were not currently employed in a pharmacy or health-related field.
- The majority of pharmacists were female (63.2%). The overall mean age was 45.9 years (range: 24 – 83; SD: 12.9 years).
- The majority of pharmacists undertook their undergraduate pharmacy training in Australia (88.6%). The average time spent working in pharmacy ranged from less than 1 year to 61 years, with a mean of 21.6 years (SD = 13.3).
- 57.7% of respondents worked in community pharmacy and 15.9% in hospital or clinical pharmacy.

NPS products and services for health professionals

The NPS health professional product/resource with the highest awareness was *Australian Prescriber* and *NPS RADAR* with 97.2% of pharmacists aware. Awareness of *NPS News* was at 96.0% of pharmacists while slightly fewer (92.4%) were aware of *Prescribing Practice Review*. Pharmacists were less aware of the NPS website (72.0%) and Therapeutic Advice & Information Service (TAIS) (46.6%).

Use of NPS health professional products/resources was, as a rule, also encouraging, perhaps with the exception of TAIS. In particular (amongst those aware):

- 58.1% frequently and 41.1% sometimes reported to read *Australian Prescriber*
- 60.7% frequently and 37.2% sometimes read *NPS News*
- 56.3% frequently and 40.0% sometimes read the *Prescribing Practice Review*
- 53.1% frequently and 36.8% sometimes read *NPS RADAR*
- 21.6% frequently and 63.4% sometimes used the NPS website
- 8.9% frequently and 49.6% sometimes used TAIS.

Between 2006 and 2008 there was a significant increase in the number of pharmacists aware of the NPS website (from 63.1% to 72.0%). There was also a significant increase in the number of pharmacists (those aware of TAIS) who were referring patients to TAIS (from 43.6% to 58.5%).

NPS products and services for consumers

The “*Common Colds Need Common Sense*” campaign was the NPS consumer program most recognised by pharmacists (72.9%). More importantly, 64.7% of pharmacists had used or referred patients to the campaign materials and 29.2% felt that the campaign was very useful and a further 60.9% felt that the campaign was useful in promoting the message to patients that antibiotics were inappropriate for common colds. Awareness of other consumer programs and resources amongst the pharmacists was mixed:

- 59.7% were aware of NPS patient information leaflets
- 52.9% were aware of *Medimate*
- 55.3% were aware of *Medicines Line*
- 49.4% were aware of the *NPS Medicines List*
- 43.3% were aware of *Medicine Update*.

Between 2006 and 2008 there was a significant increase in the number of pharmacists aware of NPS Medicines Line (from 47.3% to 55.3%) and NPS Medicines List (from 40.1% to 49.4%). There was also a significant increase in the number of pharmacists who were referring patients to use CCNCS resources (57.7% in 2006 to 64.7% in 2008), NPS Medicines Line (38.4% in 2006 to 55.4% in 2008) and NPS Medicines List (31.7% in 2006 to 52.8% in 2008).

Value of NPS

Encouragingly, the majority of pharmacists (60.4%) rated NPS to be great value, an increase from 59.0% in 2006. A further 35.0% rated NPS as moderate value, a slight decrease from 38.3% in 2006.

External influence on NPS information or activities

5.2% of the surveyed pharmacists thought that NPS information and activities were unduly influenced by government, decrease from 5.9% in 2006. A further 32.0% believed that NPS was unduly influenced by government to some extent. Between 2006 and 2008 however there was

an increase in pharmacists who believed NPS was not influenced by government (from 35.5% to 38.3%).

Only 2.7% of pharmacists thought that the NPS was unduly influenced by the pharmaceutical industry. This is close to half of the 2006 response (4.9%). A further 22.1% believed that NPS was unduly influenced to some extent. Encouragingly, almost half of all pharmacists (48.8%) believed that NPS is not influenced by the pharmaceutical industry. This has increased from 43.3% in 2006.

Feedback on NPS information and activities

Pharmacists were very positive in their views on the appropriateness, trustworthiness, clinical relevance, evidence-based nature and influence of NPS on their pharmacy practice. Overall, the proportion of pharmacists who found NPS information and activities:

- clinically relevant - 62.8% agreed and 31.6% strongly agreed
- trustworthy – 59.0% agreed and 34.9% strongly agreed
- evidence-based – 59.0% agreed and 32.5% strongly agreed
- appropriate to their needs – 62.4% agreed and 22.5% strongly agreed
- reduce uncertainty on medicines issues – 55.6% agreed 24.8% strongly agreed
- influence pharmacy practice – 48.1% agreed and 19.5% strongly agreed.

Pharmacy practice audit and training

- There were 30.0% of pharmacists who had ever enrolled for pharmacy practice audits. Of those pharmacists who did not complete the audit, the primary reason was that the audit was not having enough time (67.5%) followed by the audit not being mandatory (12.0%).
- There were 26.3% of pharmacists who received a training kit from NPS/PSA called 'Safe use of generic medicines'. Of those pharmacists who did receive the training there were 32.4% who carried out a training session with their staff.

Sources of medicines information

- The *Australian Medicines Handbook* and the *Australian Pharmaceutical Formulary* were reported to be the most used paper-based sources of information in the past four weeks (80.7% and 64.2% respectively). In contrast, *MIMS* (88.4%), the *PBS Schedule* (67.1%) and *Therapeutic Guidelines* (51.8%) were ranked highest when pharmacists were asked about their use of electronic information resources.
- *NPS RADAR* in paper format had been read by 47.6% of pharmacists in the previous four weeks but the electronic version by only 27.7%. The paper version of *Australian Prescriber* was read by 57.7% pharmacists but only 19.5% had used the web-based version. Overall 49.3% indicated they had used other paper format NPS resources such as *NPS News* in the previous four weeks, but only 18.5% used the electronic versions.

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

- Most pharmacists (85.5%) agreed that it was important to ask patients if they were taking complementary medicines while a further 13.8% agreed that it was to some extent important.
- Again the overwhelming majority agreed that it was important (94.7%) to ask patients if they were taking OTC medicines while a further 5.0% agreed that it was to some extent important.
- 43.8% of pharmacists indicated that NPS products and activities helped improve their over-the-counter advice and a further 45.2% indicated that NPS products and activities improved their over-the-counter advice to some extent.
- When questioned on whether there had been an increase in the number of patients who were willing to use generic medicines in the last 6 months, just over one quarter (26.2%) of pharmacists indicated that there had been a definite increase and a further 45.8% noted that there had been an increase to some extent.
- One fifth (20.6%) of pharmacists either strongly agreed or agreed that generic medicines were not always effective as branded medicines. A further 22.0% of pharmacists neither agreed nor disagreed.