



National Prescribing Service Limited

MEDIA RELEASE

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Push for complementary medicines to be in all medical, pharmacy curricula

The National Prescribing Service (NPS) welcomes calls for improved complementary and alternate medicine training in universities and says all health professionals have a responsibility to ensure these products are used safely.

Speaking at the annual scientific meeting of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine in Melbourne, Dr Lesley Braun said health professionals need better training at university about complementary medicines and their interactions with conventional drugs, and to make an effort to stay informed.

Research conducted by NPS last year into the complementary medicine information needs and uses found a number of issues relating to the transfer of information between health professionals and consumers.

“Most complementary medicine users are self-prescribing without understanding the implications of what they are taking, and in a number of cases, they aren’t using the products in the way they are intended,” NPS CEO, Dr Lynn Weekes said.

“At best, this may mean consumers aren’t getting the maximum benefit from the complementary medicine. At worst, they may be putting their health at risk.”

While half the consumers surveyed admitted to not telling their doctor or pharmacist they were taking complementary medicines, many health professionals said they often didn’t ask because they weren’t confident discussing these medicines with patients.

“A number of practising health professionals may not have received formal training about these medicines at university but the information is continuously changing so it’s up to each individual to keep informed.”

A second piece of research conducted by NPS, Mater Health Services Brisbane, Bond University and the University of Queensland between June and November 2008 identified and ranked the most useful complementary medicine information sources available to health professionals.

Both studies noted the need for a centralised data point that includes accurate, independent information about adverse effects, interactions with other medicines, contraindications and clinical evidence.

“Between the growing rate of complementary medicine use, the prevalence of chronic diseases and the rising number of people being hospitalised for adverse events, it’s vital today’s medical and pharmacy students gain a comprehensive understanding of safe medicines use and have ongoing access to accurate information,” Dr Weekes said.

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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.