

B11 Approach to drug-seeking patients

Purpose

To guide prescribers in the respectful approach of patients who display drug-seeking behaviour.

Example policy

[insert practice name]

Date effective:

Review date:

Policy statement – All patients have the right to professional respectful care that promotes their dignity, privacy and safety.

In the event of problematic drug use being identified, doctors at this practice should offer:

- remedial programs if this is within their skill set
- referral to appropriate drug misuse agencies.

Rationale

All patients, including those with drug-seeking behaviour, have the right to respectful care that promotes their dignity, privacy and safety.

Patients with substance use disorders have diverse needs and often complex social and psychological issues. Respecting their circumstances and assisting in offering referral to other organisations for support and management of their substance use disorder is recommended at this practice.

These patients have a medical condition (substance use disorder) characterised by presentation with manipulative or deceptive behaviour. Some doctors get offended by and upset with this sort of behaviour, but it is important to remember that these are the presenting symptoms of a condition and a professional, non-judgemental approach is necessary.

This patient will be someone's son or daughter, sister or brother, etc. Their family will be hoping that you will provide appropriate care for the patient. Getting upset, angry or being offended does not help with the rapport needed to facilitate appropriate care.

This presentation may be the one opportunity in which proper care can be organised for these patients.

Verbal scripts

Some doctors have difficulty in knowing what to say in these circumstances. The following is a suggestion only:

- *[Patient name], I am very concerned about your health. From what you have told me today, and from what I can gather from the material you have here, I am concerned you may have a substance use disorder.*
- *This is quite concerning, as ongoing use of [drug of concern] in the manner you have described may result in long-term harm for you or your health.*
- *I do not have state authorisation. Under the state law, in these circumstances, it is actually forbidden for me to prescribe these medications to you.*
- *The level of care needed to properly manage your case is outside my area of expertise, but I am happy to refer you to [insert local drug and alcohol services] to ensure that you get the care you need. I am also quite happy to provide other care outside these medications. Are you interested in that? Unfortunately, I cannot prescribe any tablets in the interim.*