



**NATIONAL PRESCRIBING SERVICE AND FEDERATION OF ETHNIC  
COMMUNITIES' COUNCILS OF AUSTRALIA**

**QUALITY USE OF MEDICINES CAMPAIGN 2008**

**RADIO INTERVIEW SPOKESPERSON  
BACKGROUND BRIEFING MATERIAL**

**SECTION A**

The National Prescribing Service (NPS) and Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) are running a national Quality Use of Medicine (QUM) educational campaign in 2008 with Chinese and Italian speaking seniors. This section provides details on this campaign and possible Questions & Answers (Q's&A's) for radio interviews on this topic.

**BACKGROUND**

In Australia, medication is taken by 70% of the population in any 2-week period, this increases to over 90% for elderly people<sup>1</sup>. Each year in Australia over 10% of people visiting their general practitioner will probably experience an adverse medicines event<sup>2</sup>. Adverse medicines events (AMEs) are when a medicine unintentionally could have harmed or did harm a person. It has been estimated that 140,000 of the adverse medicines events that occur each year in Australia are severe enough to warrant hospitalisation<sup>3</sup>. Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Australians are over-represented in these figures.

In 2008, NPS is running a national health promotion campaign for Chinese and Italian speaking seniors (over the age of 50 years). The campaign will utilise radio advertising and interviews, print media, health information resources and education seminars to share key messages on how to use medicines safely with these groups.

This campaign objectives are to improve awareness and knowledge regarding:

- what is a medicine
- the risks and benefits of medicine use, and,
- how to minimise risks and use medicines safely.

The key messages of the radio campaign define what a medicine is, identify the risks associated with medicine use and provide the target audience with simple strategies to lower the risks associated with taking medicines, including:

- Get to know your medicines by asking your doctor or pharmacist questions;
- Keep a medicine list and show it to your doctor or pharmacist each time you visit;
- Always use medicines as directed by your doctor or pharmacist;
- Always store your medicines safely;

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<sup>1</sup> Runciman W.B., Roughhead, E.E., Semple, S.J. & Adams, R.J. Adverse drug events and medication errors in Australia. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care* 2003; 15; 49 – 59.

<sup>2</sup> Miller G, Britt, H., Valenti, L. & Knox, S., Adverse drug events: counting is not enough, action is needed. *Medical Journal of Australia* 2006;184:646.

<sup>3</sup> Roughhead E, Barratt, J. & Gilbert, A., Medication-related problems commonly occurring in an Australian community setting. *Pharmacoepidemiology and Drug Safety* 2003;13:83-7

There are plans to broaden the target audience to a larger number of community groups following an evaluation of the 2008 campaign.

## **PURPOSE OF RADIO INTERVIEWS**

As a bilingual health care professional you are the key to raising awareness of the quality uses of medicine campaign.

The radio interviews will:

- Support overall QUM campaign objectives.
- Reinforce key campaign messages to community members nationally to increase awareness and understanding of QUM and what can be done to minimise risks associated with medicine use.
- Support a grass roots community approach; and complement other campaign activity such as the education seminars and the collateral information distribution.

As a campaign spokesperson, you will present information on the campaign to community members to assist in informing them about QUM.

The in language interviews provide the opportunity for you as spokesperson to reinforce key campaign messages and reiterate the importance of understanding QUM and the benefits of this knowledge for the targeted communities.

## SECTION B

### Question's & Answer's

**Disclaimer:** If the broadcaster asks you a question that you are not comfortable with or outside the parameters of this brief, it is best to take two options:

- I'm sorry I am not authorised to comment on this issue, **OR**
- I'm sorry I don't know the answer to this question, I will follow this up for your listeners and get back to you

The Q&As outlined below provide background information and a guide to responses for the radio interviews. **This is not a script.**

Broadcasters will be given a copy of the questions **only**, as a guide for the interviews.

**Q: We are talking today about medicines, and in particular how best to safely manage the medicines we take.**

**We all have to take 'medicines' at different times of our lives, but what exactly is a medicine?**

Medicines can refer to any substance that is meant to change the way your body deals with an illness or injury or to maintain your health and wellbeing.

Medicines don't just come on prescription from your doctor they can come from pharmacies, alternative practitioners, health food shops and supermarkets.

So the word 'medicines' includes prescription or over-the-counter medicines as recommended by your doctor, and can also include vitamins, traditional medicines, eye drops and other topical medicines such as creams and ointments.

**Q: Medicines are supposed to make us feel better or get well, are there any risks in taking them?**

Although medicines can make you feel better and help you get well, it is important to know that all medicines have benefits as well as risks. In Australia, medication is taken by 70% of the population in any 2-week period<sup>4</sup> and each year over 10% of people visiting their general practitioner will probably experience unwanted effects or harm from using their medicine<sup>5</sup>. These undesirable effects are responsible for over 140,000 Australians going to hospital each year<sup>6</sup>.

Some of the risks of taking medicines may include having a negative reaction when the medicine is combined with certain foods, beverages, vitamins or other medicines.

<sup>4</sup> Runciman W.B., Roughhead, E.E., Semple, S.J. & Adams, R.J. Adverse drug events and medication errors in Australia. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care* 2003; 15; 49 – 59.

<sup>5</sup> Miller G, Britt, H., Valenti, L. & Knox, S., Adverse drug events: counting is not enough, action is needed. *Medical Journal of Australia* 2006;184:646.

<sup>6</sup> Roughhead E, Barratt, J. & Gilbert, A., Medication-related problems commonly occurring in an Australian community setting. *Pharmacoepidemiology and Drug Safety* 2003;13:83-7

Listeners should be aware that the more medicines they combine, the greater the chance of their having a reaction to them.

Sometimes the medicine might not work as expected, and sometimes the medicine can actually cause you additional health problems. These are often called side effects.

It is really important to understand the benefits of medicines, but also the risks associated with taking certain medicines, and how best to minimise these.

**Q: So what can be done to minimise the risks of taking medicines?**

There are a number of simple things you can do to minimise the risks of taking medicines.

It is very important that listeners understand that they have to 'get to know their medicines'.

The first thing you should do is to ask your doctor or pharmacist about your medicines – both your doctor AND your pharmacist are trusted sources of medicines information.

There are important things you need to know about your medicines, you should make sure to always ask your doctor or pharmacist questions such as:

- Why do I need to take this medicine?
- How should it work?
- How should I take my medicine? With water or food?
- When should I take my medicine?
- How long will I need to take it for?
- Do I need to avoid any other medicines, foods or drinks when I am taking this medicine?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- Do I need regular check ups or tests while taking my medicine?
- What are the side effects of taking this medicine? And what should I do if a side effect occurs?

It is a good idea to write out a list of questions or concerns before your doctor's appointment that you would like to ask, or bring along a relative or close friend to help remember your questions.

Listeners can also get a list of questions from the National Prescribing Service in (*insert language*) from your Doctor or Pharmacy, or you can order from the NPS website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

You should also be prepared to answer questions that your doctor or pharmacist may ask you.

They will need to know about what you are already taking – they need to get a full picture in order to make the best decisions for you.

**Q: So how should our listeners go about managing their medicines?**

The best way to manage all the medicines you take is to keep a record by writing them down.

Firstly make a list of all the medicines that you take regularly and include these 5 things:

- the name of the medicine,
- the doctor who prescribed it,
- how much and how often you should take it,
- what you are taking it for; and
- the date you started and or stopped taking it.

You can get a printed Medicine List to fill in from your Doctor or Pharmacy, or you can order from the NPS website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

If you show this list to your doctor, pharmacist or any other health care professional each time you visit them they will then understand all the medicines you are taking and how they work together

If you need help in writing this list you can ask your Pharmacist or Doctor. Your Doctor can arrange for your Pharmacist to come to your home and help you write a list that includes all of your medicines. This is called a Home Medicines Review (translated) or a Home Medicines Review (English).

**Q: Is there anything else our listeners should know about managing their medicines?**

I do have a few more important suggestions on how to manage your medicines safely:

Firstly, it is important to take your medicines as directed by your Doctor or Pharmacist. If you want to change or stop your medicine you should discuss this with your Doctor or Pharmacist first.

Ask your Doctor or Pharmacist to review all the medicines you are taking at least once every year– over time your medicines may need to be changed.

Do not share your medicines with anyone else – it has been recommended for your personal medical problem and could be harmful to another person.

Store medicines safely, especially out of reach of young children and keep only those you currently need.

Dispose of unwanted medicines safely – you can take unwanted medicines to your Pharmacy and they will safely dispose of them.

The NPS have also developed 'Medimate' which you can get from your Doctor or Pharmacist or from the NPS website: [www.nps.org.au/orderform](http://www.nps.org.au/orderform).

**Q: Can you tell our listeners a bit more about Medimate?**

The National Prescribing Service have developed a brochure that gives you all the information that we have spoken about today and more, in both English and <insert language>.

The National Prescribing Service's job is to provide information to the Australian community and health professionals about the Quality Use of Medicines, which include all of the points we have covered today.

By understanding how to better manage our medicines the risks can be minimised while you can ensure that important decisions concerning your health can be made.

**Q: So it appears that there are a lot of important things to remember, if listeners want more information about using medicines, what should they do?**

Above all, listeners should discuss any problems concerning their health or their medicines with their doctor or pharmacist.

**Q: So in summary, what then are the key points of the Quality Use of Medicines campaign that our listeners should understand today?**

In order to understand how to use medicines better, there are 3 things to remember:

- Firstly, get to know your medicines, we all need to understand the medicines we are taking, and how they affect our health;
- Secondly, there are a number of things we can all do to minimise the risks in taking medicines:
  - Only take medicines as directed by your doctor or pharmacist
  - Keep a medicine list and show it to your doctor or pharmacist each time you visit
  - Make sure to review the medicines you take regularly
  - Store them correctly
- And finally, speak with your doctor or pharmacist about your health, ask your doctor or pharmacist a lot of questions so that they can make the best decisions for your health

## **SECTION C FURTHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

This section details further information to assist you in your preparation for interview.

### **What is the National Prescribing Service, and what is their objective?**

National Prescribing Service (NPS) is a member-based organisation providing accurate, balanced, evidence-based information and services to health professionals and the community on Quality Use of Medicines (QUM).

To achieve this the NPS works in partnership with GPs, pharmacists, specialists, other health professionals, Government, pharmaceutical industry, consumer organisations and the community. The NPS are independent, non-profit and funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

The purpose of NPS is to support the best use of medicines in order to improve health and well being.

### **In particular, what key services does NPS offer consumers?**

#### **Consumers**

NPS offers consumers a number of services to “get to know your medicines”:

- Free independent information materials providing expert advice regarding medicines and medicine uses
- Consumer Medicine Information service
- The Medicines Line
- Partnerships with community groups

### **What does Quality Use of Medicines (QUM) actually mean?**

QUM means:

- Selecting management options wisely
- Choosing suitable medicines if a medicine is considered necessary
- Using medicines safely and effectively.

Taking medicines is the most common health-related action taken by Australians. While there is no doubt that taking medicines saves lives and is often the most cost-effective or convenient form of treatment, it is also well-established that some medicines are inappropriately prescribed and used.

Quality Use of Medicines is about ensuring that all Australians have equitable access to high quality, safe and effective medicines. It also relies on rational use of those medicines.

In Australia various processes are in place to achieve better health outcomes through Quality Use of Medicines. A National Medicines Policy has been developed, and for more than a decade individuals have done valuable work in research and service delivery to promote Quality Use of Medicines.

The NPS was established as the first national organisation to undertake work in Quality Use of Medicines. Prior to establishing the NPS, there was no mechanism for drawing together and building on the valuable work that had been done in the past.

**What is the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, and what is their objective?**

FECCA is the Australian national peak body that promotes multiculturalism, community harmony and social justice.

It is involved in community education, advocacy for equitable access to services and information for Australians from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as human and cultural rights.

FECCA and NPS work together to increase the awareness and skills of consumers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds to manage their medicines more effectively.