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Patients and practices- the winners from Red tape reduction for PBS items

The Federal Government's changes to the PBS authority script system starting on 1 July have been welcomed by the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN). AGPN argued strongly for a reduction in the number of prescriptions that require phone authority in order to cut some of the red tape strangling general practice.

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said the changes will allow GPs to spend more time with patients instead of being 'on hold' getting approval for certain prescriptions.

"AGPN has for some time been calling on the government to review current processes and cut the red tape that requires GPs to phone a government call centre and get approval for certain medications.

"Patients will be the big winners here. They will no longer have to wait around whilst their GP is on the phone to the approval hotline for scripts they are themselves very familiar with.

"An Access Economics study found that over 1.3 million patient consultations lost each year due to authority script phone calls.

"We welcome the decision to remove 200 of the 450 approval medications. As a result an estimated 70% of approval prescriptions will be removed," Dr Hobbs said.

In 2004-2005 government figures indicate that of the 6.3 million authority scripts only 2.7% were rejected. Most patients with chronic diseases such as asthma and diabetes have an ongoing relationship with their GP. GPs are familiar with the medication and the condition.

Statistics in a report released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released last year indicate that 15 million Australian's are affected by chronic diseases. Many of the ongoing medications GPs prescribe to deal with these conditions require call centre authorisation.

"It's a very painful and time wasting experience gaining approval for prescriptions you know are the only option for your patients, particularly when they are repeat prescriptions.

"The streamlining changes requiring a special code for such scripts are a win for common sense.

"The Government's changes give GPs the power to prescribe without the current big brother scenario.

"The next step will be to review the 250 remaining medications that will still require call centre authorisation," Dr Hobbs said.

AGPN are confident Medicare Australia will undertake timely education programs for GPs.

For more information please call Kate Carnell, ADGP Chief Executive Officer, on 0415 662 266.