



NEWS RELEASE

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Non-prescription drugs not always complementary, say GPs

Dr Rob Walters, Chair of the Australian Divisions of General Practice today urged consumers not to panic about their use of vitamins and other natural health products following the Pan Pharmaceuticals recall

“Consumers should follow the advice issued by the Therapeutic Goods Administration in relation to this product recall,” Dr Walters said. “It is particularly important that people do not panic or stop taking their prescription medication, as no safety problems have been identified with prescription drugs.

“Of course, anyone experiencing symptoms that they think may be related to their medicines should see their GP immediately. Consumers should also ensure that they discuss their use of non-prescription or ‘complementary’ medicines with their doctor.

“It has long been a concern of GPs that many consumers put themselves at risk by not telling their doctor about the over-the-counter and complementary medicines they are using. This is potentially dangerous as these products can react with prescription medicines and cause serious adverse effects,” Dr Walters said.

A recent report found that up to 140,000 hospitalisations occur in Australia each year because of medication-related problems. Reactions between complementary and prescribed medications are a major cause of these problems. A study conducted at St Vincent’s Hospital in Sydney found that 18% of patients admitted to the hospital were taking complementary medicines that could potentially interact with their prescription medication. 47% of the complementary medicines being used by patients had been self-prescribed and in many cases patients had not informed their GP about their use of these products.

“Even when non-prescription medications have been recommended by a pharmacist, naturopath or other health professional, it is vital that consumers inform their GP about the products they are using so their doctor can make the best prescribing decisions, in consultation with them,” Dr Walters said.

“Your doctor is the best person to advise you on any and all medications. Naturopathic medicine and over-the-counter pharmacy drugs are only complementary to good medical care when doctors can discuss their use and the potential for drug interaction with patients.

“Doctors are also able to give their patients advice about how to sort out the genuine therapeutic products from the ‘snake oil’ being used by many consumers,” Dr Walters said.

Dr Walters suggested that people with complex medicine needs should consider asking their GP about a new service called a *Home Medicines Review*. Dr Walters said that the Australian Divisions of General Practice was working in partnership with the Pharmacy Guild of Australia on this Government-funded initiative, run through over 100 Divisions of General Practice around the country.

“A *Home Medicine Review* involves a trained pharmacist visiting people in their home for an in-depth discussion about all the medication they use. The visiting pharmacist then reports back to their GP, who meets with the patient to work out a plan for managing and sometimes adjusting their medication,” Dr Walters said.

“*Home Medicines Reviews* are improving the quality use of medicines in the community and I urge any consumers concerned about their medication use to talk to their GP about this new service,” Dr Walters said.

For comment:

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