

19 July 2010

Dear Medical Practitioner

Pain Authorities for Treatment with Opioid Drugs of Dependence

This letter outlines the processes adopted by the Drugs of Dependence Unit in the granting of authorities for pain management treatment with opioid drugs of dependence.

As you are aware, in South Australia, the extended treatment with opioids for chronic pain treatment is regulated through the *Controlled Substances Act 1984*.

Officers of the Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia's Drugs of Dependence Unit (DDU) are delegated to administer parts of the Act that help ensure the availability of appropriate pain treatment with drugs of dependence. Section 18A of the Act requires medical practitioners to obtain an Authority from the Minister responsible for the Act, to permit the prescribing and supply of drugs of dependence, where treatment with schedule 8 drugs exceeds two months for people under the age of 70 years and whose life expectancy is estimated to be greater than 12 months.

In 2007, the DDU's processes for granting these pain Authorities were reviewed. The key recommendation from this review was that additional, independent medical advice be available to Ministerial delegates when considering pain authority applications in complex cases. As a result, the DDU now has an independent Medical Officer and Opioid Medical Committee available to provide such advice. The process also introduces a benefit to treating medical practitioners in that information received from the DDU's advisory structures about specific patients is routinely shared with those practitioners.

The new processes were implemented in August 2008. A subsequent review of the processes became available later in 2009. The review found that a large majority of medical practitioners surveyed reported that the new processes were *relatively* or *very* straightforward. When asked whether they had noticed any changes to the review processes in the past 12 months, the majority of medical practitioners considered that identified changes were for the better. Some medical practitioners found the revised process had little impact on them.

The DDU's *Process for Granting Authorities for Pain Management Treatment with Opioid Drugs of Dependence* has been attached for your reference. We feel the process reflects the guiding principles involved in chronic pain management today. This circular aims to increase your awareness of factors DDU staff consider when reviewing pain Authority applications, and demonstrates our commitment to ensuring transparency in the pain Authority granting process.

Medical practitioners are welcome to contact Mr Colin Brown, A/Manager, Drugs of Dependence Unit on 1300 652 584 should they wish to discuss any aspect of the process for granting pain Authorities.

Yours sincerely



Simone Cormack
A/Executive Director

