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## Media release

### Community pharmacists are leaders in e-health innovation

Community pharmacy's willingness to adopt innovative technologies and strategies in its mission to offer consumers the highest standard of pharmacy and health care services is a focus of Ask Your Pharmacist Week 2010 (29 August – 4 September).

Whether those innovations are technological, systematic or strategic in nature, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia has developed the necessary infrastructure and culture to implement innovation quickly and in such a way as to deliver significant benefits to the public.

In the area of e-health, no other profession has done more than community pharmacy in terms of investing its own funds to support moves to the e-health model. Key examples of the Guild's e-health initiatives include:

- **eRx Script Exchange** – an Australia-wide electronic prescriptions platform which is being used by thousands of doctors and pharmacies;
- **Mirixa Australia** – a medication compliance program that helps patients maximise benefits from their medicines and ensure they remain compliant with their medicines;
- **findapharmacy.com.au** – a website that helps customers find the pharmacy services they need and how to get to those specific pharmacies; and
- **PBS Online** – online claiming for Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicines ensuring tax payer funds are used efficiently.

Over 2200 pharmacies and some of Australia's leading pharmaceutical manufacturers are now signed up to participate in Mirixa Australia programs.

These programs provide a systemised clinical service underpinned by an integrated web-based platform that enables pharmacists to identify patients with a high risk of non-adherence and then better assist them. The pharmacist intervenes to help encourage the patient to stick to the script through four formalised discussions over a one year period.

The result of this technology and professional intervention is a significant benefit for patients, at no extra cost. Complying with medicines (sometimes known as medication compliance or adherence) is of proven benefit to health. It is also of benefit to taxpayers because better health outcomes that keep people out of hospital longer are innately good for the sustainability of the system.

Similarly, thousands of Australian health care consumers are now benefitting from the safety and efficiency of electronic prescriptions, through eRx Script Exchange.

With eRx, GPs can create e-prescriptions with confidence that patients can have their scripts safely and securely dispensed anywhere around Australia. eRx e-scripts are designed to improve patient care and safety, and to strengthen coordination and communication between health care providers.

#### National Secretariat

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Already, over 11 million prescriptions have been transmitted electronically through the system. The longer term aim is that the vast majority of the 250 million prescriptions dispensed in Australia each year will be transmitted electronically by 2015.

eRx Script Exchange is an Australia-wide internet based gateway allowing prescriptions to be sent electronically and securely between GPs and pharmacies. It has been developed to improve patient safety by ensuring that information arrives at the pharmacy exactly as the doctor intended.

Using eRx, a doctor will continue to print a paper prescription, but it will now include an eRx barcode. At the same time, the prescription information is sent securely to eRx Script Exchange. Patients can then present their prescription at any Australian pharmacy to have their medication dispensed. The pharmacist will scan the barcode and this will retrieve the script information.

All patient, doctor and medication information is fully encrypted so that it is completely private and secure. Only the doctor and pharmacist can see the information, as they can now.

Using eRx, patients can continue to go to any pharmacy to have their original and repeat prescriptions dispensed. If the pharmacy does not have eRx available, they will dispense the medication manually as they do for all other non-electronic prescriptions.

In early 2008, the Guild launched [findapharmacy.com.au](http://findapharmacy.com.au) - a pharmacy locator service for its members.

Now customers are able to locate pharmacy premises, view opening hours, see what services are provided and even find out which languages are spoken within a pharmacy.

The [findapharmacy.com.au](http://findapharmacy.com.au) service also enables patients to print out a map and driving instructions from their front door to the pharmacy. This is particularly useful for travellers who are seeking a pharmacy while on the road.

Finally, most consumers wouldn't even notice PBS Online at work in their local pharmacy, but community pharmacy's willingness to adopt the system (with up to 98 per cent of PBS claiming being done through the program) has delivered significant savings to the Federal Government, and hence taxpayers. It's just another example of community pharmacy's willingness and ability to embrace new technologies for everyone's benefit.

Improving health outcomes through the development and implementation of e-health initiatives is an exciting part of the future of modern community pharmacy – and another reason why you should always 'Ask Your Pharmacist' if you would like to get the greatest benefit out of your medicines and the available pharmacy services.

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