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Media release

Four Corners report highlights benefits of real time recording

The case for the electronic real time recording of the dispensing of controlled drugs has been boosted by last night's extensive report on the ABC Four Corners program.

The program "Oxy: The Hidden Epidemic" highlighted the extent of the misuse of legally prescribed opioid-based medicines. The National President of the Pharmacy Guild, Kos Sclavos, appeared in the report, explaining the opportunity to utilise real time tracking of the dispensing of these powerful medicines, such as oxycodone.

As outlined on Four Corners, the misuse and abuse of prescription medicines, including controlled drugs such as opioid pain relievers, is a significant public health concern in Australia. This includes chronic use by those who have developed addictions, illicit 'recreational' use, and those engaged in diversion of these medicines to the criminal market. In the absence of effective use of current reporting systems, some individuals are able to 'doctor-shop' or 'pharmacy-shop' to procure dangerous amounts of these medicines. This is because, in most cases, a health professional has no way of knowing what medicines have been obtained elsewhere.

The Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement, which commenced in July this year, includes Government funding for the development of a more efficient, electronically-based system to collect and report data relating to controlled drugs, to minimise the problems of forgery, abuse, and doctor shopping.

The Guild has already developed technology, called Project STOP, for real time monitoring of pseudoephedrine sales. This technology has been extremely useful in the monitoring of sales of pseudoephedrine, and in the prevention of its illegal diversion.

The Guild believes the Project STOP technology can be adapted and applied very effectively to controlled drugs, in conjunction with an electronic recording system. The Guild commends Four Corners for its contribution to the community's awareness of this problem, and the work being done to address it. The Guild is ready to work with health professionals and regulators to tackle this problem.

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