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Welcome to the *Adverse Medicine Events Line* Homepage.

## 1. Background

### *Medications are a part of everyday life for most Australians*

Use of medicines (prescribed or self-medicated) is widespread: -

- 1995 National Health Survey showed that 74% of women and 63% of men took some form of medication over a two-week period;
- Australian Office of Complementary Medicines have reported that more than 60% of Australians use at least one complementary health care product each year.

Costs of medicines have also escalated:

- The government expended/s over \$4,049 million annually on Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme;
- The Australian community spent approximately \$2.3 billion on complementary medicines in 2001 This was almost four times their contribution to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), which was \$688 million that year.

### *Associated with high use is a high risk of something going wrong ...*

According to the Second National Report on Patient Safety from the Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care, an estimated 2 -3% or 140,000 hospital admissions in Australia each year are due to adverse medicine events (AMEs). Many of these originate in the community.

### *Documentation on adverse medicine events is poor*

Reducing the incidence of adverse medicine events (AMEs) has been difficult as there was no official channel for Australian consumers to document such events. Of the 12,000 reports received by the Adverse Drug Reactions Advisory Committee (ADRAC) annually, only a small fraction are reported directly by members of the public.

### *A way forward ...*

The Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care (Council) has identified the reduction of patient harm as a result of medication use as a priority area for national action. The Council, in partnership with quality use of medicine (QUM) and other organisations is working on a number of initiatives to improve medication safety.

The Australian Pharmaceutical Advisory Council (APAC) approached the Council seeking to develop a national system for consumer reporting of adverse drug events. Consultations with consumers, by APAC and other QUM organisations, since the 1980s, have consistently revealed that **consumers want an adverse drug event reporting system which enables them to directly report their experiences with medicines and that these experiences are taken seriously by the health system.**

APAC proposed that Council build on the successful project on consumer reporting of adverse drug reactions conducted in Queensland by Mater Misericordiae Health Services, South Brisbane. This project found that one in four calls to the helpline resulted in a report of an adverse drug reaction to ADRAC.

As healthcare consumers, we all have a responsibility for making medicine use as safe as possible for the community at large. Individuals can make a valuable contribution by reporting any **adverse medicine events, errors or near misses** that they experience. Reporting these events will inform agencies responsible for medication safety of where and how things go wrong with medicines. Together we can make a safer medication environment.

The **Adverse Medicine Events Line** has been established to provide an avenue for the community to report their suspected AMEs, possible errors or “near misses” with their medicines. Please help us to collect the data to improve the safety of how medicines are being used.

## **2. What is the Adverse Medicine Events Line?**

The **Adverse Medicine Events Line** is a new, interactive service through which consumers can seek information about or report adverse events associated with medicines.

By phoning **1300 134 237** Australians can report possible adverse drug reactions, medicine errors or “near misses” to experienced drug information pharmacists.

The AME Line will:

- provide a system for consumers to directly report their adverse experiences with medicines;
- encourage consumers to report adverse medicine events;
- promote openness and accuracy of information about adverse medicine events;
- identify areas and trends in adverse medicine events to know when, where and how things go wrong; and ultimately
- integrate such information into health systems to improve their safety and quality.

## **3. When is the service available?**

The **Adverse Medicine Events Line** is available to all Australians for the cost of a local call.

Hours of operation are Monday to Friday 9:00am to 6:00pm AEST (Australian Eastern Standard Time).

To improve service access during operating hours, if the lines are busy, the caller can leave contact details on voicemail and AME Line staff will return their call.

#### **4. Who operates the Adverse Medicine Events Line?**

The **Adverse Medicine Events Line** is operated by clinical and drug information pharmacists from Mater Misericordiae Health Services, South Brisbane on behalf of the Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care,

A Steering Committee oversees the operation of the service. It has representatives from:

- Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care;
- Mater Pharmacy Services;
- Consumer representative;
- Adverse Drug Reactions Advisory Committee (ADRAC) of the Therapeutic Goods Administration;
- Australian Pharmaceutical Advisory Council (APAC);
- Pharmaceutical Health And Rational use of Medicines Committee (PHARM); and
- National Prescribing Service *Medicines Line* Management Committee.

#### **5. How is privacy protected?**

When you contact the **Adverse Medicine Events Line** not only do we respect your privacy, it is protected by law. All information provided by you is confidential and cannot be accessed by anyone else without your permission. All records related to calls are stored securely.

### ***FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS***

#### **6. What is the difference between an Adverse Medicine Event, an Adverse Medicine Reaction and medication error?**

##### *Adverse Medicine Event*

An Adverse Medicine Event is when a medicine (or medicines) is administered to a person in order to improve their health but instead causes harm or exposes the person to potential harm.

There are two types of Adverse Medicine Events. These are:

1. Adverse Medicine Reactions and
2. Medication errors

## **Adverse Medicine Reaction**

An Adverse Medicine Reaction is when a medicine has been correctly administered to a person, but the person experiences a harmful effect due to the properties of the medicine.

## **Medication Error**

A medication error is when a mistake has been made in the administration of a medicine. This can cause an adverse reaction to the medicine, unpleasant experiences or can be described as a 'near miss'.

A 'near miss' is when a medication error had the potential to cause a person harm, but no actual harm was experienced. Some examples of medication error include confusing two medications because they are packaged in similar bottles, taking the wrong dosage of medication because the instructions were confusing, or failing to administer a medicine when it is required.

## **7. What is considered a medicine when talking about *Adverse Medicine Events*?**

Medicines that can cause adverse medicine events include prescribed, over-the-counter, complementary and alternative medicines.

## **8. Who can report an Adverse Medicine Event to the *Adverse Medicine Events line*?**

Anyone who has experienced, or is concerned about, a possible Adverse Medicine Event can call the *Adverse Medicine Events Line* on 1300 134 237.

## **9. When should an Adverse Medicine Event be reported?**

An Adverse Medicine Event should be reported if you feel your medication may be doing harm or as soon as you believe you have experienced a 'near miss' or adverse medicine event.

The sooner the adverse medicine event is reported the easier it will be to recall important details about the event.

## **10. What sorts of events should be reported?**

You should call the *Adverse Medicine Events Line* with information or questions on:

- Reactions or events that are serious enough to cause concern or make you reluctant to continue with your medication;
- Any sort of adverse event, including minor ones, that affects your quality of life
- Any sort of errors, or 'near misses', that occur with your medicines.

Reporting of adverse medicine events provides an opportunity for information to be collated about people's experiences with medicines, which can be used to help prevent adverse medicine events in the future.

## **11. When reporting an *Adverse Medicine Event*, what information will I need to provide?**

So that you and the *Adverse Medicine Event Line* staff can get the most benefit from your call to the *Adverse Medicine Events Line*, it will be helpful if you can provide us with details on the following:

- General information on all current medications being taken (including over-the-counter, complementary and alternative medicines)
- Information about the suspected adverse medicine event
- How the health of the person has been affected
- If a possible medicine error has occurred, your thoughts about how this could be prevented in the future
- Some demographic information such as age and sex
- Any underlying symptoms or medical conditions

## **12. Why should people report Adverse Medicine Events with their medicines?**

Medications that have been approved for sale have been extensively tested. However, unanticipated reactions are still possible because the numbers of people using medications after approval are far greater than the numbers of people involved in testing medicines.

The appropriate authorities can use information gained from the reporting of Adverse Medicine Events to notify health professionals and industry about issues with medicines and provide advice and take action to reduce medication hazards to everyone's benefit.

### **Common concerns about reporting *Adverse Medicine Events***

## **13. Does it cost money to file a report?**

Anybody in Australia can access the *Adverse Medicine Events Line* for the cost of a local call. All reports are processed at no cost to the caller beyond the local call cost.

## **14. What if I am taking several medicines and do not know which one is potentially causing problems?**

It is important to report any problems you think might potentially be caused by your medicines, even if you are taking many medicines. If you provide information about all medicines you are currently taking, valuable associations between medicines and adverse events can be made and information provided to you to assist with the problems you may be experiencing.