



Secretary

Department of Health & Human Services

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Cheryl Vella
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006



Dear Ms Vella

Investigation into the death of Jamie L Apap (Court ref: COR 2010 003678)

I am writing in response to your letter of 29 July 2015 relating to Coroner John Olle's recommendations to the now Department of Health & Human Services in his finding into the death without inquest of Mr Jamie Apap.

I note that the finding was originally delivered on 18 February 2015 and was set aside in June 2015 to consider new facts and circumstances from the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

The department's response to the Coroner's updated recommendations follows:

Recommendation 1:

In line with the recent recommendation published by State Coroner Ian Gray in Finding with Inquest into the death of Anne Brain (COR 2011 4797), I recommend that the Victorian Department of Health progress the implementation of a Victorian-based real-time prescription monitoring system as a matter of urgency to prevent ongoing harms and deaths associated with pharmaceutical drug misuse and inappropriate prescribing and dispensing of pharmaceutical drugs.

The department's response:

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that all Victorians receive the best health care and treatment possible. This includes ensuring effective communication channels between health professionals.

Earlier this year, the Minister for Health signed a Deed Agreement with the Commonwealth to gain access to the Electronic Recording and Reporting of Controlled Drugs software. This software will contribute to a nationally consistent system that allows prescribers and pharmacists to have access in real-time to the patient's relevant medication history during a consultation.

In the May 2015 Budget, the Government committed \$300,000 to evaluate and plan for the implementation of a real-time prescription monitoring system.

The department is currently commissioning consultancy work to plan for the IT requirements, workforce planning and development and other change management issues necessary for successful implementation of a real-time prescription monitoring system. The work will also include an evaluation of the Electronic Recording and Reporting of Controlled Drugs software to ensure its suitability to Victoria's requirements.

This implementation planning work will ensure that Victoria implements this important and potentially lifesaving system in the most effective way.

Recommendation 2:

While the Victorian Department of Health continues with its efforts to implement a real-time prescription monitoring program for Schedule 8 drug dispensing, it also identifies the legislative and regulatory barriers that might prevent drugs listed in other schedules (particularly Schedule 4) from being monitored within the scope of the program. If any such barriers are identified, I recommend that the department considers what reforms are necessary so that in due course its real-time prescription monitoring program can be expanded beyond Schedule 8 drugs. This will enhance clinicians' ability to make appropriate clinical decisions about patients.

The department's response:

It is generally considered good medical practice when prescribing Schedule 8 medicines to avoid the risk of overdose by taking into account the patient's use of other sedating substances such as benzodiazepines or alcohol.

The department has noted with concern that numerous overdose deaths investigated by Victorian Coroners involve combinations of Schedule 8 and certain Schedule 4 medicines. While it is Victoria's intention to focus on Schedule 8 medicines at the initial stages of implementation of a real-time prescription monitoring system, other prescription medicines may be considered for inclusion as use of the system becomes well-established in general medical practice over time.

Other options that may be considered to enhance the safe prescribing of medicines include training and resources for prescribers during workforce development prior to introduction of a real-time prescription monitoring system, updating relevant clinical guidelines, and rescheduling of particularly problematic medicines to Schedule 8.

If you require further information, please contact Matthew McCrone, Director, Medicinal Cannabis & Real-Time Prescription Monitoring Project Taskforces on 9096 5066 or via email matthew.mccrone@dhhs.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Kym Peake
Acting Secretary

12/10/2015