

29 November 2016

Mr Samuel Barty
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
Southbank VIC 3006

Dear Mr Barty,

Re: Court ref: COR 2013 005788 – death of Melissa J May

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) acknowledges receipt of your letter dated 31 August 2016 regarding the death of Melissa J May (Court ref: COR 2013 005788).

Pursuant to Section 72(2) of the Coroners Act 2008, the RACGP responds to the recommendation as follows:

Recommendations

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Pharmaceutical Board of Australia collaboratively consider how they might incorporate the lessons of this case into future training and the design of future interventions to reduce pharmaceutical drug-related harms.

The RACGP Standards for General Practices (the Standards) are a template for quality care and risk management in Australian general practice. The RACGP is currently developing the next edition of the Standards (5th edition) which will be launched in October 2017.

The current edition of *Standard 1.6: Coordination of care* relates to general practice engagement with a range of relevant health and community services to improve patient care.

Criterion 1.6.1 – Engaging with other services requires general practice to engage with a wide range of health, community and disability services to plan and facilitate optimal patient care. Indicators include the ability of general practice to demonstrate planned and coordinated comprehensive care by interaction with other services including pharmacists.

The Coroners finding in relation to this matter and subsequent recommendation will be taken into consideration in the development of the next edition of the Standards.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Pharmaceutical Board of Australia collaboratively consider the need for the development of a joint guideline in relation to communication between the professions to ensure the safe prescribing and dispensing of drugs of dependence, including methods of implementing daily dispensing, avoiding early dispensing and the provision of prospective prescriptions.

The RACGP Clinical Guidelines, Prescribing drugs of dependence in general practice (the Guidelines) include three parts.

Part A: Clinical Governance Framework (for prescribing drugs of dependence in general practice) to the guide provides practices with key principles, strategies and tools for appropriately prescribing or not prescribing drugs of dependence. Complementing the Australian regulatory framework, Part A of the guide summarises the complex levels of formal and informal controls in this area. The guide describes how applying a clinical governance framework can improve patient care and reduce abuse, misuse and dependence.

Part B: Benzodiazepines to the guide aims to assist general practitioners in appropriate prescribing of benzodiazepines, to discourage inappropriate use and to reduce harm. Implementing principles from Part B of the guide will facilitate accountable prescribing of benzodiazepines, improve practice systems of care and support patient-focused care. Care coordination is covered in the Guidelines under *Section 1.6 Clinical governance*.

Part C: Opioid Prescribing, development of this section of the guide has commenced.

Feedback and advice was sought from organisations, groups and individuals in the development of the Guidelines including from the Pharmacy Board of Australia.

The Coroners finding in relation to this matter and subsequent recommendation will be taken into consideration in the development of the next edition of the Guidelines.

The RACGP strongly advocates for the introduction of real time prescribing as evidenced by the development of a discussion paper in 2014 *Electronic assistance with managing abuse of prescription drugs* and media releases calling for the immediate rollout of a real-time prescription drug database.

Representatives from the RACGP have been involved in the consultations for the implementation of real time prescribing in Victoria and on the Department of Health Implementation Committee.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners consider the need for further education and training or assistance to rural general practitioners dealing with complex patients suffering chronic pain and prescription drug dependence.

The RACGP offers a wide range of educational programs and activities via many delivery modes, the activities reflect current technology and best practice in the delivery of education and training, and recognise individual needs of doctors such as their working hours, locations and preferred learning styles.

RACGP Victoria specifically hosts a Drug and Alcohol Conference in the first half of the year, the conferences are consistently well supported with registrations in 2016 exceeding 75 RACGP members. The RACGP Victoria has also been successful in securing a state government tender to provide an opiate substitution training program for GPs. With the help of Medical Educators from the RACGP, the first module has been transformed to focus on safe prescribing of opiates.

This committee has contributed to government initiatives in substance misuse and has a forward plan of ongoing evening education. On 23 November, Associate Professor Nicole Lee of the National Drug Research Institute delivered the first in a series of educational events for the coming year.

Should you or the Coroner wish to discuss this further, please contact RACGP Victoria on (03) 8699 0303.

Yours sincerely



Dr Cameron Loy
Chair, RACGP Victoria