



Secretary

Department of Health & Human Services

50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
Telephone: 1300 650 172
GPO Box 4057
Melbourne Victoria 3001
www.dhhs.vic.gov.au
DX 210081

8 APR 2015

e3711732

Josh Munro
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Dear Mr Munro

I am writing in response to your letter of 22 January 2015 relating to Coroner Audrey Jamieson's recommendations to the Department of Health & Human Services in her finding into the death without inquest of Mr Peter Oelfke.

The department's response to the Coroner's recommendation is as follows:

Recommendation:

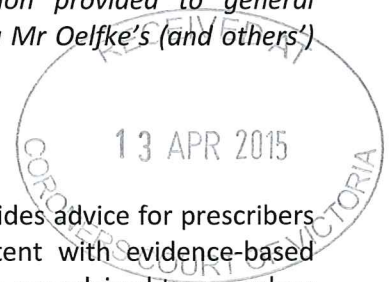
1. *That the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services review the circumstances of Mr Oelfke's death, in considering whether the current takeaway dosing advice in the Victorian Policy for Maintenance Pharmacotherapy for Opioid Dependence provides sufficient criteria (rather than guidance) for the ongoing nature of permits for takeaway dosing of methadone, considering the practical realities of general practice medicine, including patient volumes, consequential time allocation, and the broad clinical discretion provided to general practitioners that ultimately permit the circumstances surrounding Mr Oelfke's (and others') death.*

The department's response:

The *Policy for Maintenance Pharmacotherapy for Opioid Dependence* provides advice for prescribers to assist with making treatment decisions which are safe and consistent with evidence-based practice. The policy includes a ready-reckoner checklist which prescribers are advised to use when assessing the appropriateness of takeaway doses to ensure that all relevant issues concerning takeaway doses have been considered.

In the circumstances surrounding the death of Mr Oelfke, where it was apparent that he did not have stable accommodation and there were increasing concerns of alcohol intoxication, the policy advises against the prescribing of take-away doses.

While the department advises practitioners to practice pharmacotherapy according to the policy's recommendations, the policy is not intended to replace professional judgment in individual cases.



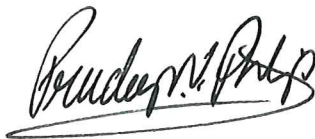
Modern clinical practice encourages making treatment decisions which are transparent and open to peer-based review. The policy encourages practitioners to discuss clinical matters with other practitioners involved in the patient's care to make treatment decisions with collaborated support.

It is not the purpose of the policy to place mandatory controls for decisions of a clinical nature. As qualified professionals, practitioners may decide to exercise clinical discretion where they consider it necessary and justifiable in an individual case to vary from the recommendations in the policy.

While practitioners understand the professional responsibilities they have when making treatment decisions for patients, they are also fully aware that their professional Boards may take action where their practice or conduct places the patient or the public at risk of harm.

If you require further information please contact Mr Matthew McCrone, Chief Officer, Drugs and Poisons Regulation on 9096 5066 or email matthew.mccrone@health.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pradeep Philip', written over a horizontal line.

Dr Pradeep Philip
Secretary