



Department of Health

Secretary

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Mr Josh Munro
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Mr Munro

I am writing in response to your letter dated 9 April 2014 relating to Coroner Audrey Jamieson's recommendations to the Minister for Health in her finding on the death of Mr Kirk Steven Ardern.

The Department's response to the Coroner's recommendations is as follows:

Recommendation:

1. I recommend that the Victorian Department of Health amend the January 2013 Policy for Maintenance Pharmacotherapy for Opioid dependence, to incorporate explicit advice on managing vulnerable opioid replacement patients, including those recently released from prison, to reduce the likelihood a newly paroled client will overdose on methadone. The amended policy should indicate that a client transferred from prison to a community-based service should be treated in the same way as a new patient commencing treatment and should not be provided takeaway doses until medical, psychological and social stability in the community is established.

The department's response:

The current policy was developed and later reviewed by the Department's Advisory Group on Drug Dependence. The Department has reconvened this group of experts (now the Pharmacotherapy Advisory Group) to consider a number of issues relating to the policy.

The new data on overdose in the paroled population and the accompanying information on the range of additional risk factors relating to that group of people presented on pp. 20-21 of the Coroner's findings present a cogent and useful argument. Indeed those factors may present a risk to other opioid replacement therapy patients who have recently left a controlled living

environment, such as people recently discharged from a drug rehabilitation service, or a lengthy hospital stay. The Coroner's recommendation will be considered by the Advisory Group at its forthcoming meeting.

Recommendation:

2. I recommend that the Victorian Department of Health explore options for implementing a Victorian-based real-time prescription monitoring system to prevent ongoing harms and deaths associated with pharmaceutical drug misuse and inappropriate prescribing and dispensing of pharmaceutical drugs.

The department's response:

The Department is very concerned to ensure the minimisation of deaths and other harms related to pharmaceutical drug use. Accordingly, during 2013 the Victorian Department of Health commissioned a business case to explore the options and present recommendations to the Minister regarding the possible establishment of a real-time prescription monitoring system (RTPM) in Victoria. The business case has presented its recommendations and these are currently under consideration.

Recommendation:

3. I recommend that within three months, the Victorian Department of Health should create a page on its website regarding real-time prescription monitoring, the ERRCD system and other related topics. The page should provide up-to-date information regarding the planning and implementation of this crucial public health initiative. Transparent, continuous disclosure of progress would assist a broad range of stakeholders, including peak medical and pharmacy bodies, Coroners and the Victorian public.

The department's response:

The establishment of an information page on the development and implementation of an RTPM may indeed be useful and interesting to a range of stakeholders in the community. However, at this stage, such an item is more likely to be useful after the necessary consideration of the business case for an RTPM has been completed.

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



Dr Pradeep Philip
Secretary