



Department of Health

Secretary



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Ms Nisha Jholl
Coroner's Solicitor
Coroner's Court of Victoria
Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Ms Jholl

Court reference: COR 2009 005699 Dion K Heather

I am writing in response to your letter dated 8 November 2013 relating to Coroner K. M. W. Parkinson's recommendation to the Minister for Health in her finding on the death of Dion K. Heather.

The Department of Health's (the department) response to the Coroner's recommendation is as follows:

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Health take steps to prohibit the supply of 'take-away' doses of the Schedule 8 drug methadone by drug addicted persons and require that methadone therapy be delivered and administered at a pharmacy premises under the supervision of a registered pharmacist.

The department's response:

The department has responded to a previous recommendation made by Coroner Parkinson to prohibit the supply of take-away doses (COR 2009 002063). The Coroner's recommendation was given further consideration within the context of an impending review of the department's *Policy for Maintenance Pharmacotherapy for Opioid Dependence* (the policy). As part of that review, her recommendation was considered by an advisory group consisting of key clinical experts in opioid pharmacotherapy.

After a thorough review process the advisory group concluded that arrangements for take-away dosing remain an integral strategy in retaining people in treatment and normalising their lives. Evidence shows that the risks of opioid misuse, including overdose, are substantially reduced with increased patient retention in treatment. As with any other potent medication, the risk of death associated with deliberate or accidental misuse of take-away doses of methadone needs to be balanced against its documented therapeutic benefits and the increased risk of death when patients cease methadone treatment.

The current policy on take-away methadone dosing substantially reduces the risks of opioid dependence, as long as it is applied according to the guidelines set out in the policy, which emphasises the regular assessment of patient stability. To this effect, the department will take further steps to promote and encourage prescribers' compliance with the policy.

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