



## Department of Health

Incorporating: Health, Mental Health and Ageing

50 Lonsdale St  
Melbourne  
Victoria 3000  
GPO Box 4541  
Melbourne  
Victoria 3001  
Telephone: 1300 253 942  
Facsimile: 1300 253 964  
[www.health.vic.gov.au](http://www.health.vic.gov.au)  
DX 210311

18 MAR 2013



Our Ref: ADD/13/6267

Your Ref:

Mr Jeff Dart  
Coroner's Registrar  
Coroners Court of Victoria  
LEVEL 11, 222 Exhibition Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Mr Dart

I am writing to you in relation to the Investigation into the death of **DA, Court Reference: 5260/09.**

As you are aware, the former Chief Health Officer, Dr John Carnie, wrote to you on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2010, in response to your request for a submission on "Sourcing medical advice and non-pharmaceutical 'therapeutic' products from internet sources". This correspondence detailed strategies being undertaken by the Department of Health to raise awareness in the community of the risks of sourcing medical advice from non-mainstream internet sites as well as efforts being undertaken by the Department to raise awareness in the community of risks of self-medicating with complementary medicines.

In your report in relation to the above referenced case, you "recommend that the Chief Health Officer for Victoria/ the Department of Health consider sponsoring the joint development of a public education campaign about the dangers and risks of sourcing medical information online....."

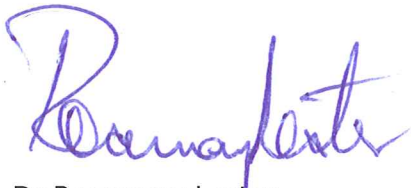
On consideration of this recommendation, the Department believes that the most appropriate course of action in raising awareness of the risks of sourcing medical information online is through the Better Health Channel (BHC), the consumer health and medical information website most frequently visited by Australians (approximately 13 million visits in 2009). In response to your initial correspondence to the Chief Health Officer in October 2010, the Department has reviewed all its content on the BHC relevant to accessing health information and advice from the internet. In particular I would like to draw your attention to the updated factsheet alerting consumers to the dangers of disreputable information, "cyberquackery", self-diagnosis and purchasing products on-line. This can be located at the following address:

[http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Health\\_information\\_on\\_the\\_internet.](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Health_information_on_the_internet)

The Department does not believe that a potentially open-ended public education campaign as recommended would add significant value to the strategies it has already invested in, through the BHC. On the other hand, we are keen to provide an optimal impact throughout the community utilising the BHC as the principal resource. The Office of the Chief Health Officer is therefore continuing to work closely with the BHC team in an ongoing review of all BHC content that will provide appropriate guidance regarding access to online health information, advice and Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAM).

Should you wish to discuss this further, I refer you to Mr David Haubenschild, Manager Better Health Channel Services (9096 2785) and/or Dr Michael Ackland, Senior Medical Advisor, Office of the Chief Health Officer (9096 5186)

Yours sincerely



Dr Rosemary Lester  
Chief Health Officer