



Secretary

Department of Health

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

BAC-CO-36564

Coroner Audrey Jamieson
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
Via e-mail: team7@courts.vic.gov.au

Dear Coroner Jamieson

I am responding to your finding into death without inquest of Bradley Scott Liefvoort (Coroner's reference COR 2021 002849). I was deeply saddened to learn of Bradley's death and would like to convey my condolences to his loved ones, in particular Linda Matthews and their three children.

Response to recommendation

I recommend that the Medicines and Poisons Regulation Section of the Victorian Department of Health implement suitable measures to identify when prescribers are not complying with requirements to check SafeScript before prescribing target drugs, and impose suitable measures to deter prescribers from similar conduct in future.

I acknowledge the recommendation and accept that the Department of Health (the department) can do more to identify when prescribers are not complying with requirements to check SafeScript and to ensure suitable measures are undertaken to deter prescribers from similar conduct in future.

SafeScript was designed and implemented so that prescribers and pharmacists can check, in real time, whether a patient under their care is visiting multiple prescribers and obtaining high risk medicines that could result in harm. It is important to note that the system does not stop a prescription being issued or a medicine being dispensed. Instead, the system provides real time medicines records for the patient that can be assessed, in conjunction with the clinician's clinical practice records, diagnostics and patient history, to inform clinical decision making. The department's role includes working to ensure that prescribers and pharmacists are checking SafeScript before prescribing or supplying a monitored medicine.

As a result of Mr Liefvoort's death, the department has increased its focus on identifying situations where patients are continuing to visit multiple prescribers and where requirements to check SafeScript have not been adhered to. Since the implementation of SafeScript, the department has contacted prescribers and pharmacists on a continual basis through individual intervention letters and bulk communications to ensure they are aware of their obligations. The department is now working with the Behavioural Insights Unit, Department of Premier and Cabinet to improve the readability of communications.

The department has reviewed the compliance and enforcement tools available under the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* to determine whether the powers available to Authorised Officers for regulating the mandatory use of SafeScript are fit for purpose. The review also assessed proportionality noting the outcomes for patients of non-compliance by pharmacists and prescribers may vary significantly.

SafeScript has a high volume of transactions (46,000 records collected daily) and large user base (36,600 registered users), so powers that are timely and proportionate are required to continue to change behaviour. As a result of this review, the department proposes to develop additional enforcement tools, which would require consultation and legislative change to implement.

The department is committed to ensuring that prescribers and pharmacists fulfill their legal obligations under the Act using a risk-based approach to identify high risk scenarios where there is potential for harm to patients following unsafe prescribing or dispensing of medicines. In the most severe cases, department investigations result in the prosecution of medical practitioners and pharmacists. The department also works closely with Ahpra and refers matters to Ahpra for consideration by the relevant health practitioner board. This may occur in addition to a decision to prosecute to ensure timely action can be taken to protect the public, noting the time that may lapse during the court process.

Finally, I am conscious of the risk of poor patient outcomes that result when patients with complex needs such as addiction are abandoned by prescribers who are fearful of repercussions by regulators. To manage this risk the department is careful to avoid overzealous use of compliance and enforcement actions and places focus on education when engaging with health practitioners. Notwithstanding this, the department commits to improving processes used for proactive review of SafeScript data to improve compliance with checking SafeScript to help prevent tragedies such as Bradley's death occurring in future.

Should you wish to discuss anything raised in this letter in further detail, please contact Laura Mulligan, Acting Director, Medicines and Poisons Regulation at the Department of Health via email to [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely



Jacinda de Witts
Acting Secretary
15/08/2023