



Media Release

4 July 2019

Health professionals must be supported to deliver appropriate pain management to people receiving palliative care

Palliative Care Australia (PCA) has welcomed Chief Medical Officer Professor Brendan Murphy's comments in support of Australian GPs prescription of opioids for acute pain, palliation and cancer pain.

In recent editorial in [GP News](#), Professor Murphy responded to the sector's concerns about Department of Health communication to GPs last year regarding opioid prescribing rates, in an attempt to reduce their misuse and abuse within the wider community.

In his editorial Professor Murphy wrote "We are certainly aware that these initial letters did cause some anxiety and distress for some GPs, and I apologise for that".

"I want to reiterate that we strongly applaud and encourage the work of GPs who are working in palliative care, cancer management and in complex pain clinics. It would be most disappointing and undesirable if any such GPs feel their opioid prescribing practice is anything other than encouraged and supported."

PCA's National Clinical Advisor and Palliative Care Nurse Practitioner Kate Reed, has welcomed Professor Murphy's comments, saying that it is critical that palliative care health providers receive adequate support to manage the pain and breathlessness needs of their patients.

"All Australians receiving palliative care must be able to access necessary and appropriate evidence based opioids to manage and prevent suffering from uncontrolled pain and other symptoms.

"Finding relief from severe pain can be a challenging and exhaustive experience for people with life limiting conditions and their caregivers. Opioids are an essential part of the pharmacological options needed to help relieve the pain and/or breathlessness that may be experienced by someone living with a life limiting illness," said Ms Reed.

In April 2019 PCA released a position statement, [Sustainable access to prescription opioids in palliative care](#), in endorsed by 12 other peak health organisations, to call for a "future-proof" approach to ensure sustainable access to prescription opioids for Australians receiving palliative care.

"Outside of palliative care, the misuse and overprescribing of opioids is a serious public health issue that must be addressed. However, it must not be at the expense of palliative care patients who have a basic human right to have their pain needs met."

"Opioids are an essential part of the pharmacological options needed to help relieve the pain and/or breathlessness that may be experienced by someone living with a life limiting illness."

"It is therefore essential that authorised prescribers of opioid analgesics, including GPs, palliative care specialists and nurse practitioners, are given adequate support to treat their patients' pain needs promptly and appropriately without unnecessary regulatory barriers," said Ms Reed.

PCA would like to thank the President of RACGP, Dr Harry Nespolon for his ongoing [advocacy work](#) and support, for the provision of appropriate prescribing of opioids to patients with palliative care needs.

Media contact: Grace Keyworth 0422 040 576

palliativecare.org.au

