

SA Palliative Care Community Pharmacy Update

A joint initiative of South Australian Palliative Care Services

Advance Care Directives are a means for adults to document their preference for future healthcare. Community pharmacists may be asked to be an authorised witness.

Murray

Murray and his partner Ian have been regulars at your pharmacy for years. You have formed a good professional relationship with them and have regularly dispensed their medicines over this time.

Murray was diagnosed 11 months ago with an inoperable brain tumour. His symptoms have since progressed and his GP has stressed the need for an advance care directive (ACD). Murray asks for you to witness his signature on the completed ACD. He is appropriate in conversation.

Advance Care Directives

The South Australian ACD Form was simplified 3 years ago and discussed in [issue 27 \(299kb pdf\)](#).

To validate an ACD, it must be signed (including initials on each page) by the **patient** and an **authorised witness**. A pharmacist may be the authorised witness, and must be independent of the person writing the ACD, thus excluding:

- > Beneficiaries, either directly or indirectly of the person's estate (usually a relative);
- > People appointed as a Substitute Decision Maker (SDM);
- > People in a position of authority in a hospital or nursing home (e.g. aged care manager); and
- > Professionals providing care to the person including possible future care (e.g. a doctor or nurse).

In relation to this final point, community pharmacists should carefully consider the nature of their professional relationship with a regular customer before witnessing an ACD. If they regularly seek your advice about medicines and/or other health-related issues, it may be inappropriate for you to witness their

ACD. Professional judgement must be applied to ensure that you are independent of the person you are witnessing for.

Processes for Authorised Witnesses

Prior to signing as an authorised witness, the pharmacist must:

- > Ensure the ACD has been finalised, including the signature of the SDM if appointed (no need to witness the SDM's signature);
- > Engage in meaningful dialogue with the person, checking for capacity (see page 12 and 13 of the ACD Form for guidance);
- > Provide the person with the 2 page ACD information statement (page 7 and 8 of the ACD Form).

Once signed, individuals should be encouraged to keep the ACD in a safe - yet accessible - place for when they are required. Certified copies should be made for the GP, specialist, hospital and family to have on hand. A pharmacist may certify copies of the ACD regardless of any relationship with the person.

Useful resources

- > [SA Health Advance Care Directive website](#)
- > [Advance Care Directive website](#)
- > [Advance Care Directive Form \(371kb pdf\)](#)

For more information

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This update is intended to provide practical up to date and factual information relating to pharmacy and medicines management in the setting of Palliative Care and is based on critical review of available evidence. Individual patient circumstances must be considered when applying this information. Please feel free to distribute this update further to interested colleagues.

