

SA Palliative Care Community Pharmacy Update

A joint initiative of South Australian Palliative Care Services

As palliative services are developed with a greater emphasis on community based models of care, community pharmacists will become more aware of the carer's role.

Carers

Reduced energy and function in those living with a life limiting illness means that self-management becomes less practical, as the disease progresses. So, the support of an informal carer is vital, if that person is to remain at home.

Informal carers take considerable pressure off the health system by giving many unfunded hours of emotional and physical assistance. However, carers often have competing responsibilities which can significantly limit the time and concentration they have available to provide support. Issues that can often challenge carers include:

- > Balancing obligations to employers and the needs of their immediate family and other dependents;
- > Difficulty navigating complex healthcare systems;
- > Physical, emotional or financial stress resulting in carer burnout;
- > Failure to respond to their own health needs e.g. missing their own medical appointments;
- > Poor self-care e.g. avoiding exercise, doing without rest and forgetting meals;

For many carers, the prospect of managing someone else's medicines will be a new responsibility. There is now clear evidence that carer fatigue and inability to cope, as well as medicine errors are leading causes for unplanned admissions to hospital. Research reveals that carers can feel unsupported in completing the complex tasks linked with managing medicines. Some carers will impose their own (misguided) values on medicines management, (such as opioid avoidance

because they believe they are "addictive").

By recognising the role of the carer early, pharmacists can be both a practical and informative resource that helps to reduce carer stress. This can include

- > Providing education about medications used in palliative care;
- > Complementing the messages provided by other health services e.g. community nursing;
- > Offering practical solutions to support the carer e.g. home delivery of medicines or dose administration aids;
- > Recognising carer stress and supporting referral to a GP, counsellor or carer support network.

In Australia, there are several government funded payments that can reduce the financial burden associated with caring; these may assist in the cost associated with some of these solutions.

Useful resources

- > Commonwealth Care link SA
www.carelinksa.asn.au
- > CarersAustralia:
www.carersaustralia.com.au/
- > Department of Human Services:
www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/themes/carers

For more information

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