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Involving medication experts is more than a placebo

Revelations this week that doctors are prescribing medicines they know are not indicated for the conditions the patient has presented with demonstrates why pharmacists must be more actively involved in medication management in Australia.

“Prescribing unnecessary drugs to patients is not good practice in terms of quality use of medicines,” Pharmaceutical Society of Australia National President, Associate Professor Chris Freeman said. “The more medicines a person has to take and manage the more risk there is of a medication related problem.”

“While there may be some situations in which a placebo might help a patient, the research released this week found doctors were most likely to prescribe an antibiotic. Unnecessary prescription of antibiotics can not only cause patients harm but impact on the future effectiveness of these vital medications.”

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare’s (AIHW) Australia’s Health 2018, unnecessary prescribing of antibiotics leads to a higher risk of adverse side effects and increased anti-microbial resistance in the population.

“Anti-microbial resistance means when we get sick in the future, antibiotics will not be able to fight the bacteria causing the infection,” Assoc Professor Freeman explained.

“There is also a cost to the health system every time a placebo medication is prescribed.”

Government spending on PBS medicines increased by 11 per cent between 2015-16 and 2016-17 to reach \$12.1 billion.

“While the cost of placebo prescribing was not quantified by this research, it clearly places an additional burden on our health care system and may also leave patients out of pocket for no good reason.

“Safe and quality use of medicines was declared a National Health Priority Area last month. The regular prescribing of active placebos – real drugs that won’t address the underlying condition – seems to fly in the face of all we are trying to achieve.

“Increased utilisation of pharmacists as part of a collaborative health care team, including within general practice, will improve medication management and help educate consumers about quality and safe use of medicines.”

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