

MEDIA RELEASE**1 June 2007****Should nurses, pharmacists and physiotherapists be allowed to prescribe?**

'*Competency for new prescribers*' is an editorial by Emeritus Professor Anthony Smith from the Newcastle Mater Hospital and University of Newcastle. It appears in the June edition of *Australian Prescriber*, a bi-monthly peer reviewed journal published by National Prescribing Service Limited (NPS).

Professor Smith looks at examples of extending prescribing rights to nurses in the UK, and compares them to the situation in Australia. He argues that there is support for extending prescribing to non-medical health professionals, especially in rural and remote areas not served adequately by doctors and pharmacists.

"The health and convenience of patients must be a factor in deciding whether to extend prescribing rights," argues Professor Smith. "With adequate training, supervision and regular evaluation, non-medical health professionals working with limited formularies should be capable of prescribing to an appropriately high standard".

"Perhaps what matters most is not the range of health professionals who may prescribe, but the adequacy of their training and continuing professional development," writes Professor Smith. "Prescribing worldwide is not uniformly of high quality (for example, over-prescription of antibiotics) and until recently training in prescribing has been inadequate."

"The essential ingredients of prescribing competency start with an adequate diagnosis as, in its absence, all prescriptions are likely to be irrational," he said.

Other prescribing considerations discussed in the article include:

- Prescribers must select a safe and cost-effective drug from those available as they are often aided by evidence-based guidelines
- Writing a legal prescription with computer support is comparatively simple to master
- Helping patients adhere to their treatment requires skill and knowledge – in particular patients must be alerted to the possibility of adverse reactions and know what to do if they occur.

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