



Australian Prescriber



AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW

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HOLLOW NEEDLES SUPPORTED SHARP PRACTICE

The hypodermic needle has a relatively recent, but notorious history. Yet, the story of its "enthusiastic adoption" has much to say about contemporary medical practice and symbolises the power of the active practitioner over the passive patient, according to an article by Glyn Brokensha in the current issue of *Australian Prescriber*. (Dr Brokensha teaches in the Medical Education Unit at the University of Adelaide.)

Alexander Wood introduced the 'hollow needle' in 1853 to inject painful areas with morphine-like drugs. Charles Hunter was discouraged from this technique when his first two patients developed abscesses. He then discovered that patients gained just as much benefit from the drug if it was injected elsewhere. Hunter coined the term 'hypodermic' and claimed his treatment superior, thus starting a 'turf war'.

During the debate, physicians continued both treatments, seemingly "blissfully unaware of the systemic effects of the drug they were injecting and the nature of the demand for the new treatment; thriving practices developed in response to what was seen as a potent, benign and beneficial treatment." Unfortunately the patients had become addicted to the drugs.

Astoundingly, the underlying assumptions of efficacy and safety were never questioned.

But that was the 19th century. This is now and such practice would never occur, or would it?

As unproven treatments are still prevalent, Dr Brokensha says it would be naïve to assume that today's practitioners are immune from such influences.

Further information: Dr Glyn Brokensha phone (08) 8303 6219 (W)

The current issue of *Australian Prescriber* also looks at the unacceptably high rate of medication misadventures in older Australians and claims for antioxidant nutrients: can they deliver all their promises?

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