

June 2002

55 000 Australians drink at dangerous levels

One in six Australians drink too much alcohol according to an article in the June 2002 edition of *Australian Prescriber*, an independent review published by the National Prescribing Service (NPS). Every year nearly 4000 people die due to complications of alcohol use.

In his article, *The management of the heavy drinker in primary care*, Professor Greg Whelan of St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne, says that the problem is frequently concealed.

"There are many barriers to the recognition of this problem and often it is hidden among other physical, social and psychological problems. Patients may not link these problems with their drinking," Professor Whelan said.

"GPs and other health care workers can play an important role in helping the heavy drinker. This requires a high level of suspicion, the capacity to make the diagnosis and to support the individual in a sensitive way," said Professor Whelan.

Professor Whelan discusses some of the simple tests, which can show if someone has a drinking problem. He also suggests strategies to help heavy drinkers.

"Lifestyle changes are important and there are many community services which can help," said Professor Whelan.

Some medicines can help prevent people who have stopped drinking from starting again. However, Professor Whelan says, these medicines are not a cure in themselves.

"Drug treatment should only be used as an adjunct to other management strategies," he said

For the complete article visit the *Australian Prescriber* website at www.australianprescriber.com *Australian Prescriber* is an independent review providing critical commentary on therapeutic topics for health professionals. The current issue of *Australian Prescriber* also looks at complementary medicines.

The National Prescribing Service (NPS) is an independent Australian organisation for Quality Use of Medicines. For further information about the NPS visit the NPS web site at www.nps.org.au

Media enquiries: Miriam Fletcher, Public Relations Manager, National Prescribing Service (NPS) (02) 9699 4499 or 0417 422 420

CP.06.02