

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme: the be all and end all?

Professor David Henry and Ruth Lopert place the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) under the microscope in an editorial published in the most recent edition of *Australian Prescriber*.

According to Henry and Lopert, addressing the issue of prescriber behaviour is key to the future of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and the continued access to affordable drugs for all Australians.

The Australian PBS is one of the most highly developed processes for subsidising drugs in the world. Australia was also the first country to introduce explicit requirements for economic analysis as part of the process of selecting drugs for public funding.

“The process of a drug becoming listed on the PBS begins with the pharmaceutical companies submitting a proposal including both economic and clinical data so that comparative costs and benefits can be considered. Once the clinical performance of a drug has been established issues about cost can then be considered and economic considerations are placed within a clinical framework,” Professor David Henry said.

“Some of the more recent criticism of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) (the body that evaluates and recommends drugs for listing on the PBS) revolves around the issue of transparency,” Professor Henry said.

“At present the PBAC is required to keep the data and its deliberations confidential. For example, the identities of the drugs that have been considered and rejected and the grounds for rejection remain secret. Although the positive recommendations were recently published the amount of information should be increased to include comprehensive technical summaries,” Professor Henry said.

“There are many issues that need to be addressed but at the core of all of this is the issue of prescriber behaviour – this is fundamental because the future of the PBS and the welfare of patients who depend on access to affordable drugs lie in the hands of health professionals,” Professor Henry said.

For the complete article visit the *Australian Prescriber* web site www.australianprescriber.com *Australian Prescriber* is an independent review providing critical commentary on therapeutic topics for health professionals, published by the National Prescribing Service (NPS). The NPS is an independent Australian organisation for Quality Use of Medicines. For further information about the NPS visit the web site www.nps.org.au

Media enquiries:

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

12 December 2002
TP.12.02/CP.12.02