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**Media release**

**30 November 2004**

## **Atypical antipsychotics: To prescribe or not to prescribe?**

The debate over whether to prescribe atypical antipsychotics instead of conventional antipsychotics features in this month's *Australian Prescriber*, with Professor Vaughan Carr and Professor Nicholas Keks arguing the benefits and pitfalls of the use of the more expensive atypical drugs.

Professor Carr, from the University of Newcastle, argues that the minimal and variable benefits offered by atypical antipsychotics are outweighed by their high costs. He says that although atypical antipsychotic drugs appear to be better tolerated than conventional antipsychotics, neither group is homogenous with respect to its adverse effects. In fact, "studies comparing conventional and atypical antipsychotics show equal efficacy, or at most, modest therapeutic benefits for the atypical drug."

Atypical antipsychotics account for over two thirds of all antipsychotic drug prescriptions. In 2003 the most popular atypical antipsychotics accounted for \$197 million in costs to the government. Professor Carr makes the case that the clinical advantages of atypical antipsychotics do not justify this expenditure.

Professor Keks, from Box Hill Hospital and Monash University in Melbourne, disagrees with Professor Carr. He contends that atypical antipsychotics hold their place in therapy as they have fewer adverse effects than conventional antipsychotics.

Professor Keks concedes that different atypical antipsychotics are clinically quite different from each other and their efficacy varies from patient to patient. He maintains, however, that atypical antipsychotics have the advantage of being able to treat psychoses effectively in most patients in doses that do not induce adverse effects experienced with the use of conventional antipsychotics.

Also in this issue of *Australian Prescriber* are two editorials debating the merits of new drugs, and an article examining the vascular effects of COX-2 selective inhibitors which led to the withdrawal of rofecoxib by Professor Ric Day, Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, and Honorary Visiting Professor Garry Graham (both of the University of New South Wales and St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney).

For the complete article visit the *Australian Prescriber* web site [www.australianprescriber.com](http://www.australianprescriber.com). *Australian Prescriber* is an independent review providing critical commentary on drugs and therapeutics for health professionals. It is published by National Prescribing Service (NPS), an independent, non-profit organisation funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. NPS works to improve the health of all Australians through Quality Use of Medicines.

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TP Dec.04

***Australian  
Prescriber***