



***The Continued Dispensing of PBS Medicines in Defined Circumstances
(Continued Dispensing) initiative***

Background

The Continued Dispensing initiative, as funded under the Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement, refers to the supply of an eligible medicine under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) or Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS) when there is an immediate need for that medicine but it is not practicable to obtain a prescription. The pharmacist must be satisfied that:

- the medicine has been previously prescribed, therapy is stable and there has been prior clinical review by the prescriber that supports continuation of the medicine; and
- the medicine is safe and appropriate for the consumer.

The aim of the initiative is to maintain patient adherence to therapy by preventing treatment interruption due to the inability to obtain a timely prescription renewal. Current arrangements permit pharmacists to supply Prescription Only (Schedule 4) Medicines without a prescription in urgent or emergency situations. Continued Dispensing will complement these current provisions and allows pharmacists to process a PBS/RPBS claim without the need for a follow-up prescription.

When the arrangements commence, a Continued Dispensing supply will be limited to two therapeutic categories:

- Oral Hormonal Contraceptives for systemic use.
- Lipid Modifying Agents, specifically the HMG CoA reductase inhibitors ('statins') as listed in the Schedule of Pharmaceutical Benefits.

Medicines in these therapeutic categories which are not listed in the Schedule of Pharmaceutical Benefits will be out of scope for this initiative.

A review of the initiative will take place within two years and will measure the extent to which the initiative has met the objectives identified within the Fifth Agreement, including the appropriateness of the eligible therapeutic categories.

Current status and timeframe for implementation

The Australian Government has introduced changes to PBS legislation to enable Continued Dispensing supplies to be claimed under the PBS/RPBS. However, to enable successful national implementation, legislation in each state and territory must also be amended. Advice from the states indicates that this is not likely to occur until 2013. The necessary jurisdictional amendments may also be developed at differing times and implementation may therefore be staggered across the states and territories during 2013.

While pharmacy dispensing software will incorporate new functionality for Continued Dispensing events, pharmacists cannot supply and claim medicines under Continued Dispensing until legislation in their state has been amended in 2013.

What are the 'defined circumstances'?

Continued dispensing may only occur in defined circumstances which are:

- The medicine requested is identified in the relevant legislation as eligible for supply by Continued Dispensing.

- There is an immediate need for supply of the medicine to facilitate continuity of therapy, and it is not practicable for the person to obtain a prescription for the medicine from an authorised prescriber.
- The medicine has been previously prescribed for the person, the consumer's therapy is stable, and there has been prior clinical review by the prescriber that supports continuation of the medicine.
- There is a need for ongoing supply, and the medicine is safe and appropriate for that consumer.

Professional Guidelines

Legislation will require pharmacists to comply with the *Guidelines for the Continued Dispensing of eligible prescribed medicines by pharmacists*, developed by the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia. The Guidelines will be released publicly prior to implementation of the initiative.

Key components of the Guidelines include:

- Continued Dispensing is not intended to replace existing emergency supply arrangements, but will complement them. Therefore, pharmacists will have the following four options when receiving a request for supply without a prescription:
 - dispense the medicine on receipt of an order from the prescriber by telephone or other means (with a written prescription to follow);
 - provide an emergency supply of the medicine (usually 3 days with no need for a follow-up prescription);
 - provide the medicine by Continued Dispensing allowing a PBS claim to be made without the need for a follow-up prescription; or
 - referral to a prescriber without supply of the medicine.
- Continued Dispensing may only be utilised on one occasion during a 12 month period (per medicine);
- The prescribing of the medicine will continue to be the responsibility of the patient's doctor or alternative authorised prescriber;
- The pharmacist must inform the most recent prescriber in writing within 24 hours that supply has occurred under Continued Dispensing; and
- Pharmacies will implement an internal policy and procedure which must include adequate record keeping.

Unlike Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement (5CPA) programs, pharmacies do not need to register for these new arrangements.

Further information will be available to pharmacists following passage of legislation permitting Continued Dispensing to operate in their state or territory.

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