



THYROID FLYER

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Feature - Medication

Editorial

By Gail Pascoe

Welcome to this edition of *Thyroid Flyer*. In this edition we look at "Medications." A vital topic for all of us.

Since our last issue a very informative and successful meeting was held at Ballarat, with 50 attendees. An excellent talk was provided by Alun Stevens. We also had the opportunity to meet some of our long term members from Ballarat. Thanks to all those who organised the day, especially Renate Durand. And thank you also to the Ballarat Base Hospital for allowing us to use their excellent lecture room free of charge.

A presentation was also made by Merilyn Rogers and Robyn Koumourou to the Health and Natural Therapies Group in Grovedale, which was also very successful.

We have been very busy organising our meeting schedule for the year and have a number of excellent meetings planned – they are listed on page 10. Note the dates in your diary now.

With our continued growth our administration needs to expand. Our operations have outgrown the home office we have been using since we started. We now need to find an office. This of course needs money so we are now putting a big effort into achieving funding from government sources. This is a slow process, but critically important to enable us to continue to grow and provide greater service to our members and the community. Do you know anyone who could assist us achieve funding? If so, I would love to hear from you or from them.

Thyroid Australia is currently built around our volunteer base and is totally dependent upon all of us volunteers. The demands on our volunteers are rising as we grow our profile. Recent articles in the *New Idea*, for instance, have generated

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What to do with Unwanted Medicines

How do you store medicines in your home? Do you keep medicines you no longer want or need? If so, have some of them passed their expiry date? How do you dispose of your unwanted medicines? Are these important wise use of medicines issues?

Where are medicines kept?

A recent Melbourne-based pilot (preliminary) survey looked at how and where people stored medicines in their homes and how they disposed of them.

Medicines were stored in various places around the home: in the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, laundry, lounge, and even the toilet – and often in more than one place in the same house. In some cases, they were kept in a secluded place: in a shoe box, drawer or shelf. In others, they were kept in the open or with food, drinks, cleaning products, toiletries, veterinary products, laundry detergents and so on. Some of the medicines had missing or unclear labels.

Some of the participants were embarrassed to find long expired medicines in their homes. They found half empty bottles with almost unreadable labels, blisters with unrecognisable brand names, and loose tablets wrapped in foil. 'What's all this stuff!', one woman exclaimed. 'Do you mind if I get rid of this junk right now?' Laughing, she started throwing the tablets and capsules into the rubbish bin and pouring liquid medicines into the kitchen sink.

What are the implications of these findings for the wise use of medicines? From a health perspective, the main issue is consumer safety. Unclear labelling and storing medicines with other products can lead to misuse, accidental poisoning and mistakes. Keeping medicines in places easily accessible by children and people with dementia puts these vulnerable groups at risk. In addition, expired medicines may not be effective. From an economic perspective, more people being hospitalised due to accidental poisoning increases the cost of the health system.¹ From an environmental perspective, disposing of medicines inappropriately is hazardous to the environment.

Return of Unwanted Medicines Disposal (RUM) program

What do we do with medicines that have passed their expiry date and are no longer needed?

In 1998 the Commonwealth Government began funding the Return of Unwanted Medicines (RUM) Disposal Program to help consumers dispose of unwanted medicines. Through the program, consumers can take their unwanted medicines to a pharmacy (chemist). The pharmacy stores them until they can be collected and taken to a national depot for safe disposal.

Over 250 tonnes of unwanted medicines were returned to pharmacies through the RUM Program in the 2001-02 financial year. A separate survey indicates that the nature of returned medicines is concerning. One third have not been opened, and about half have hardly been used.² This suggests that many purchased medicines are being wasted or used inappropriately. This pattern of return was similar to that found in comparable surveys in Germany³ and Switzerland.⁴

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NEXT PUBLIC MEETINGS

MELBOURNE

31 May 2003

MORNINGTON

28 June 2003

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THYROID AUSTRALIA

MEMBER BENEFITS

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Thyroid Australia's services are funded by membership fees and donations from individual members of the public.

Membership is not expensive and your money goes towards the costs of maintaining and hosting this site, staffing our office, producing our newsletter and researching thyroid problems and treatments.

Please visit the About Us section of our web site for details of how you can join Thyroid Australia and help us help others just like you.