



National Prescribing Service Limited

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## Best practice for dementia management: new NPS program

As Australia's population ages, dementia becomes a bigger challenge for doctors, their patients and carers. To assist doctors understand best practice for patients with dementia the South East Alliance of General Practice (Brisbane) will be participating in a new National Prescribing Service Limited (NPS) program, "*Treating the symptoms of dementia*".

It is estimated that almost 190,000 Australians have dementia. As the population grows and ages, the number of cases of dementia is expected to increase. Is medicine the answer?

"Research indicates that the benefits of cholinesterase inhibitors and memantine are small and adverse effects are common," says NPS clinical expert, Education and Quality Assurance Program Manager, Ms Judith Mackson.

The "*Treating the symptoms of dementia*" education program provides GPs with an opportunity to access clinical information about the use of cholinesterase inhibitors and memantine, best practice for treating dementia symptoms, and receive practical tips about how to monitor and objectively assess the therapy.

With an NPS Facilitator, GPs will discuss how to manage patient and carer expectations of the effectiveness of medication and, if there are no clear beneficial effects of the medication, the process of withdrawal.

The program will:

- Consider the limited benefits of treating patients with dementia using cholinesterase inhibitors and memantine
- Explore recent controversy around the risks of using antipsychotics for the treatment of behavioural problems in patients with dementia
- Discuss a planned approach to identifying and avoiding the risk of cholinergic burden in older people in relation to commonly prescribed drugs
- Discuss a selection of non-pharmacological interventions for patients with dementia

"This program helps support health professionals make informed decisions when working with patients with dementia," says Ms Mackson.

The program includes: one-on-one educational visits from NPS facilitators and small-group, case-based peer meetings for GPs, the staff of aged-care facilities and pharmacists.

Further information can be found in the August 2008 edition of *NPS News*, No. 59, which includes a case study, and the *Prescribing Practice Review* (PPR), Edition 43, which was distributed to GPs in August. All resources are accessible via the NPS website [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au).

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**The National Prescribing Service Limited (NPS)** is an independent, non-profit organization that supports a quality use of medicines by providing accurate, balanced, evidence-based information and services. The information NPS provides is based on critical analyses of current evidence, and is consistent with national guidelines. It is reviewed by independent researchers and experts in clinical pharmacology, medicine, general practice and communication. NPS is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.