Dear Residential Aged Care Providers

Medication Management in Residential Aged Care Facilities

The Department of Social Services has recently had a number of issues brought to its attention that concern medication management and staff qualifications. It is timely to therefore remind ourselves of the underlying requirements approved providers of Commonwealth subsidised residential aged care services are required to meet and to note some of the tools that are available to assist with this.

The primary function of a residential aged care service is to see to the needs of the care recipients. We know that people entering residential aged care tend to be older, frailer and have multiple conditions. This is often accompanied by a complex medication regimen which can include medicines that carry a higher risk of adverse events for older people and/or have a narrow therapeutic window. This in turn has implications for the skill mix of the aged care workforce required to safely meet the needs of the care recipients.

The Aged Care Act 1997 and the associated Principles and Standards require providers to ensure that:

“The organisation’s management has systems in place to identify and ensure compliance with all relevant legislation, regulatory requirements, professional standards, and guidelines, about health and personal care” Standard 2.2.

And

“Care recipients’ medication is managed safely and correctly” Standard 2.7.

Each State and Territory has legislation covering the use, administration and ordering of medicines. This may include the relevant minimum competency or qualification level required. Providers are required to ensure that all treatments and procedures, including medication, comply with the requirements of their specific State and Territory laws (Aged Care Principles 2014; Schedule 1, part 2, item 2.4). Providers also need to ensure that where a minimum qualification is required, that they have undertaken appropriate steps to validate the qualifications of their staff. The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) can be used to check that health professional staff are registered and can therefore undertake the duties assigned to them.

Each provider will need to consider the needs of their care recipients, the meeting of the Standards and the local legislation governing the use of medicines in determining the staffing skill mix they require and the processes they may use. While State and Territory legislation provides the minimum requirement, a provider may need to implement additional
steps or a higher skill mix depending on the specific needs of the care recipients in their care.

In considering the ability to meet the needs of care recipients, providers need to ensure that they are cognisant of the steps in medication management. Medication management involves more than the administration of a medicine. It also includes, for example, the monitoring of a care recipient after administration of a medication. It can also involve a decision about administering a medication versus withholding a medication while obtaining further medical advice. Providers need to be able to ensure that they have a system that covers all aspects of medication management.

To assist providers with medication management and staffing considerations there are a number of resources available.

The *Guiding principles for medication management in residential aged care facilities* is published by the Department of Social Services (originally published by the former Department of Health and Ageing). This is available on the [Department of Social Services website](https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/ageing-and-aged-care/publications-articles/guiding-principles-for-medication-management-in-residential-aged-care-facilities). As well as providing a set of guidelines, the document also contains links to State and Territory contacts for further regulatory or policy advice specific to a jurisdiction.

Additionally, work has continued on the development of a National Residential Medication Chart (NRMC). This has been developed specifically for use in the residential aged care sector and designed to improve medication safety for care recipients. It also aims to minimise the administrative burden on aged care staff when ordering, administering or supplying medicines. The NRMC has been tested and evaluated by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. Further information on the NRMC and tools to enable its use can be found at [http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/medication-safety/medication-chart/nrmc/](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/medication-safety/medication-chart/nrmc/).

When employing nursing staff, determining their current qualifications and registration can be checked at the [AHPRA website](https://www.ahpra.gov.au/). AHPRA does not cover the unregulated roles such as that of Personal Care Workers (PCW). Providers may need to sight appropriate documentation to validate claims of competency or training. Providers also need to ensure that use of these workers is appropriate to the care needs of their care recipients and concords with relevant State or Territory legislation.

Yours sincerely

*Authorised for electronic transmission*

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