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PATIENTS SHOULDN'T PANIC OVER CODEINE

Doctors are urging Queenslanders who routinely use codeine to seek medical advice before over-the-counter sales of the pain-killing drug stop on February 1.

All codeine-based products – including Panadeine, Mersyndol and Nurofen Plus – are being banned from sale without prescription following a ruling by the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

AMA Queensland Vice President Dr Jim Finn, an addiction medicine specialist, said it was now time for people with chronic, painful conditions to seek alternative treatments.

“Although many people regularly take codeine combination painkillers, these products may seriously damage the liver, kidney and stomach if taken in large doses,” Dr Finn said.

“Codeine, like other opioid drugs, can also be highly addictive for some patients.

“These factors explain why codeine is being linked to a growing number of deaths in Australia.

“Making codeine combination products prescription-only is the right decision – but doctors are aware that some patients may be very worried about managing their pain.”

Dr Finn said research had demonstrated that codeine combination products in the recommended quantities were no more effective than other painkillers.^[1]

“Patients who feel dependent on codeine should see a GP as soon as possible to discuss their long-term treatment,” Dr Finn said.

“It may be in the patient’s best interest to gradually reduce their codeine use under supervision

“Or they may have underlying health problems that need to be investigated and for which a long-term prescription painkiller may be the best option.

“The important thing is for patients to seek help now, to avoid panic and unnecessary pain later.”

Research published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*^[2] found codeine toxicity contributed to 1,437 deaths between 2000 and 2013 and was the underlying cause of death in 113 cases.

More than 20 countries – including the US, Germany and Japan – have introduced similar restrictions in the past decade.

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^[1] [Effect of a Single Dose of Oral Opioid and Nonopioid Analgesics on Acute Extremity Pain in the Emergency Department](#), A.Chang, P.Bijur, D.Esses, Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA Network), November 2017

^[2] Trends and characteristics of accidental and intentional codeine overdose deaths in Australia (Amanda Roxburgh, Wayne D Hall, Lucinda Burns, Jennifer Pilgrim, Eva Saar, Suzanne Nielsen and Louisa Degenhardt), *Medical Journal of Australia*, October 2015