



Tasmania
DEPARTMENT of
HEALTH and
HUMAN SERVICES

PATIENT INFORMATION

PRESCRIPTION OF NARCOTICS

Narcotic drugs are capable of causing drug dependency. However, narcotics such as morphine are also effective in the treatment of people suffering severe pain.

Under Tasmanian law, in many circumstances before a doctor can write a prescription for a narcotic he/she may be required to do a number of things. These include:

- Apply for an authorisation to prescribe a narcotic under S22 of the *Alcohol and Drug Dependency Act 1968*,
- Consider whether or not the patient is drug dependent,
- Give notification of a patient's drug dependency, if applicable.

Note: Whether or not a doctor considers that a patient is drug dependent is a decision to be made by each doctor to make on the basis of his/her clinical assessment of a patient.

Before a decision is made, the applications are referred to a medically based expert panel of advisors. The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (or his/her delegates) convenes the panel to provide information advice and/or recommendations in relation to as to whether or not a particular authorisation should be issued. **This advice may also recommend the inclusion of particular conditions, which the Secretary has the power to place on the authority. These conditions may include supervision requirements.**

The reasons that these conditions may be imposed are that the:

- the medication is one of a class of substances which is known to be subject to misuse or abuse by some recipients, causing serious harm including overdose or death in some cases;
- the drug is subject to illegal trafficking, leading to increased levels of criminality, drug abuse and dependency and spread of infectious diseases; and
- there is a reasonable suspicion that there may be a risk of misuse or diversion of this medication.

Authorisation is **specific to the doctor requesting it** and only doctors at the same practice of the authorised doctor are authorised to prescribe if the authorised doctor is absent. A prescriber can request a permit can be transferred to a new treating doctor. The expert panel now routinely requires specialist reports before approving prescribing for more than 6 to 12 months

In the case of patients suffering from a **terminal malignancy** an authorisation to prescribe is still needed. In such cases authorisation will be given for a period relevant to the patient's condition and/or age.

Talk to your doctor if you need more information
(Prepared with input from the Solicitor General's Department)

May 2004