

Proposal to change the law to enable nurses to supply medicines

The Department of Human Services is considering the possibility and impact of changing the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act (1981)* and *Health Professions Registration Act (2005)* to authorise appropriately trained registered nurses (Division 1) working in rural Victoria to supply medicines for specific conditions, under certain circumstances and according to evidence-based protocols.

At present, registered nurses are authorised to administer medicine under a doctor's order, or in accordance with standing orders, if the nurse is competent to do so and it is not possible to contact a doctor and/or immediate treatment is necessary in order to save a person's life or prevent serious injury to a person's health.

Changing the current arrangements relating to nurses' capacity to supply medicine may maximise the health services' capacity to deliver safe services in rural communities. For example, on weekends in some rural communities where there is no pharmacist or doctor present, people presenting at the emergency service needing antibiotics or pain relief have to return to the hospital for every dose required. There is evidence in other parts of Australia that enabling nurses to supply medicines for particular conditions and under specific circumstances is safe and does improve access to health care.

The implications of the proposed changes will be explored in terms of acceptability, patient safety, outcomes and access, costs, medico-legal issues, service sustainability, recruitment and retention, training and clinical governance.

Please submit your comments to Elise Sullivan at elise.sullivan@dhs.vic.gov.au by 11 April 2008 or by telephoning Elise Sullivan on 03 9096 2011.