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## Budget cuts increase medicine safety risks

Federal Government budget cuts will end the only program which supports General Practitioners (GPs) and pharmacists to work together – at a time when the National Health Reform agenda is promoting integration, says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

He said the likelihood of patient medication errors would rise with the end of the program because it helps patients manage often complex medication regimens.

“Instead of integration, which has been the Government’s catchcry for health reform, we’re seeing further fragmentation and disintegration of primary health care providers, and that’s not good for Australian consumers,” Dr Djakic said.

“We’re also going to see job losses among valuable staff who provide important support and capacity across Australia through the General Practice Network to improve the health and wellbeing of the population.”

The medication management review (MMR) facilitator program, rolled out through general practice networks around the country, is the only national model that supports GPs, pharmacists and consumers in managing medications. Under the Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement, announced yesterday, funding for this program will end from 1 July 2010.

“This funding cut runs counter to the concept of encouraging health professionals to work in teams, and to coordinate and integrate their services around the needs of consumers, and instead promotes pharmacists working alone, in isolation from the team,” Dr Djakic said.

Patients who undergo a Home Medicine Review (HMR) are visited at home or at a practice and receive information about their medications and how to take them and potential side effects.

“Patients can get confused about their medications and the consequences can lead to adverse effects on their health. More than 140,000 patients are admitted to hospital every year as a result of problems with the use of medicines. This includes adverse reactions to drugs,” he said.

Local MMR facilitators add value to the general practice team. They play a vital role in bringing together medical professionals to ensure the service is patient focused. HMRs offer patients a personalised review of their medicines with professional input from the GP and pharmacist.

“Patients who take medicines regularly need to be confident that they are getting the best results from their medications. The HMR Service is part of this assurance. This will not happen without the background work of the facilitator promoting and supporting the coordination of these medication reviews,” Dr Djakic said.

**For media interviews contact Communications Manager Frith Rayner on: 02 6228 0819/  
0402 267 190**