*Approach to drug-seeking patients policy template*

Purpose:

To inform practice staff about practice’s policy regarding drug-seeking behaviour.

For more information, please refer to the RACGPs [Prescribing drugs of dependence in general practice – Part A – Clinical Governance Framework](https://www.racgp.org.au/clinical-resources/clinical-guidelines/key-racgp-guidelines/view-all-racgp-guidelines/prescribing-drugs-of-dependence/prescribing-drugs-of-dependence-part-a).

[Insert practice name] approach to drug-seeking patients policy

*Current as of: [insert date of last revision]*

*Version no: [insert version number]*

*Review date: [insert date]*

**Policy statement –** In the event of identification of problematic drug use, doctors at this practice should:

* offer remedial programs if this is within their skill set
* offer referral to appropriate drug misuse agencies.

**Policy statement** – Patients have the right to respectful care that promotes their dignity, privacy and safety.

**Policy statement –** Patients with substance use disorders have diverse needs and often complex social and psychological issues. Respecting their circumstances and assisting in offering referral to other organisations for support and management is recommended at this practice.

Doctors at this practice are reminded that the patient has a medical condition (substance use disorder) and they often present with manipulative or deceptive behaviour. Some doctors get offended and upset with this sort of behaviour, but it is important to remember that these are the presenting symptoms of a condition, and the medical and social circumstances of these patients can often be complex.

All patients, including those with drug-seeking behaviour, have the right to good medical care. This patient will be someone’s son/daughter, sister/brother, etc. Their families will be hoping that you will provide appropriate care for the patient. Getting upset, angry or being offended does not help with the rapport needed to facilitate appropriate care.

This presentation may be the one opportunity in which proper care can be organised for these patients. Doctors need to be non-judgemental, use a neutral ‘matter of fact’ tone of voice and be empathetic to the individual circumstances. Don’t be afraid to explore the issues around the patient’s substance use.

Use your rapport. Ensure confidentiality. Acknowledge that it may be difficult for the patient to share this information. The less judgmental you are, the more likely the patient is to reveal information and long-term care can be facilitated.

Remember, this is a disorder that needs to be addressed in a professional manner. However, having a patient focus does not mean that you will continue prescribing drugs of dependence.

Some doctors have difficulty in knowing what to say in these circumstances. The following is a suggestion only:

*[patient name] I am very concerned about your health. From what you have told me today, and from what I can gather from the material you have here, I am concerned you may have a substance use disorder.*

*This is quite concerning, as ongoing use of [drug of concern] in the manner you have described may result in long term harm for you or your health.*

*Under the state law, in these circumstances, it is actually forbidden for me to prescribe these medications to you.*

*The level of care needed to properly manage your case is outside my area of expertise, however I am happy to refer you to our [insert local drug and alcohol services] to ensure that you get the care you need.*

*I am also quite happy to provide other care outside these medications. Are you interested in that?*

*Unfortunately, I cannot prescribe any tablets in the interim.*

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