

**Question on Notice**  
**No. 350**  
**Asked on 8 May 2014**

DR FLEGG asked the Minister for Health (MR SPRINGBORG)-

**QUESTION:**

With reference to my concerns raised in Parliament on 6 May 2014 about narcotic analgesics like Endone and Oxycodone —

Is the Minister able to detail the number of analgesic prescriptions supplied within public hospitals by drug i.e. Endone, Oxycodone, Fentanyl patches as well as simple analgesics like Paracetamol?

**ANSWER:**

I thank the Honourable Member for Moggill for his question.

There are ongoing concerns about the misuse of pharmaceutical opioid drugs in the community as these have been linked to overdose and deaths and diversion to the illicit market. However, these drugs are important in the treatment of chronic pain conditions and palliative care situations, such as persons suffering cancer.

Queensland public hospitals use these analgesic drugs to treat acute and post-operative pain conditions and palliative care patients. Public hospitals records of prescriptions dispensed on discharge or to outpatients, show that in 2013 over 3,000 Fentanyl prescriptions (approximately a quarter of one per cent of all prescriptions) were issued. For Oxycodone products, such as Oxycontin and Endone, over 46,000 prescriptions (less than four per cent of all prescriptions) were issued in 2013 on discharge or to outpatients. The opportunity for misuse of these drugs in the public hospital system is extremely unlikely as they are mainly used for inpatient care and to a lesser extent for discharge medications, so there is limited opportunity for abuse or diversion.

The use of these drugs in the wider community, prescribed by community general practitioners is monitored by the Department of Health's 'Monitoring of Drugs of Dependence System'. The system reported that in 2013 that for Oxycodone drugs, almost 4,000 persons per 100,000 population received prescriptions and over 18,000 prescriptions per 100,000 population were dispensed in Queensland. For the drug Fentanyl, almost 400 persons per 100,000 population received prescriptions and over 3,000 prescriptions per 100,000 population were dispensed in Queensland.

The Commonwealth Government and State and Territory Health Ministers endorsed the 'National Pharmaceutical Drug Misuse Framework for Action 2012-2015' in 2013 to address the concerns around the use of prescription drugs. The framework recommends a number of strategies such as supporting doctors and pharmacists, regulation and monitoring, consumer health information, treatment and harm reduction and research and evaluation.

Currently, the Department of Health provides a 24 hour 7 day a week telephone enquiry service for doctors to find out details of patients prescribing histories of prescription opioid drugs. The service allows medical practitioners to make a more informed decision about the clinical management of the patient. The Department is also investigating if it can move to 'real-time' reporting of opioid drug dispensing to better address matters such as 'doctor shopping'.

The Queensland Opioid Treatment Program is available to treat persons with prescription opioid drug problems through Queensland Health alcohol and drug treatment services and community general practitioners. This program is available throughout the state.

The Department of Health also works closely with the Queensland Police Service to ensure illegal activities around the trafficking or sales of these drugs are addressed when identified.

The management of any concerns related to the use of prescription medications have to be balanced to ensure patients with legitimate medical conditions are not denied appropriate treatment and that harms from misuse of these drugs are limited.