Australian drugs and poisons nomenclature

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Objective

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) initiated national registration in July 2010, removing barriers for pharmacists working interstate. Drugs and poisons legislation, which guides the safe and legal practice of pharmacists, remains the responsibility of the eight Australian state and territory jurisdictions. This research aimed to investigate differences in drugs and poisons nomenclature between jurisdictions that may confuse, or disrupt the legal practice of Australian pharmacists.

Methods

A literature review of core Australian state and territory drugs and poisons legislation was conducted in 2013. Researchers reviewed particular schedules of the Standard for Uniform Scheduling of Medicines and Poisons (SUSMP) as they applied to each jurisdiction and documented the nomenclature used to describe the schedules, and exceptional categories of medicines within the legislation, of each of the states and territories. In order to limit variability in interpretation of the regulations and reduce errors, data were verified by another researcher.

Results

Nomenclature is the most inconsistent aspect of Australian legislation. All jurisdictions recognise the SUSMP schedules, but use different terminology to describe them, e.g. Schedule 8 medicines are termed Drugs of Dependence (SA, TAS, VIC), Controlled Drugs (QLD, SA), Prescription Drugs (SA), Drugs of Addiction (NSW, WA), Controlled Medicines (ACT), Restricted Medicines (ACT), Non-Restricted and Restricted Drugs (NT) and Narcotics (TAS). All S4 drugs in Queensland are Restricted Drugs, whereas in the ACT, Restricted Medicines include S8 drugs, benzodiazepines, anabolic steroids and SUSMP Appendix D drugs, thereby providing inconsistent terminology and difficulty in interpreting drugs and poisons legislation.

Conclusions

Uniform national drugs and poisons legislation is imperative to facilitate a common practice reference for all Australian pharmacists.