

MEDIA RELEASE

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Guidelines for the handling of medication in community based palliative care services in Queensland

For many years palliative care service providers have been concerned about how to effectively, safely and legally administer medications for palliative care patients who wish to remain at home. These concerns are addressed in the new *Guidelines for the handling of medication in community based palliative care services in Queensland* that have been developed following collaboration between many palliative care professionals. The *Guidelines* represent consensus-based best practice in palliative care and have recently been endorsed by the Chief Health Officer, Queensland Health.

The *Guidelines* provide a best-practice platform to assist individual Government and non-Government palliative care services in the production of their own policies and procedures regarding the handling and administration of medications prescribed to palliative patients living in the community. The *Guidelines* will improve patient quality of life and patient outcomes by contributing to optimum symptom control.

The initial need for these *Guidelines* was highlighted by uncertainties concerning the clinical implementation of the *Health (Drugs & Poisons) Regulation 1996* with regards to the role of registered nurses in assisting lay carers with the administration of "as required" subcutaneous medications for palliative patients at home. To clarify this, the Palliative Care Network Brisbane Forum, chaired by Palliative Care Queensland, formed a Medication Subcommittee with key stakeholders including representatives from Palliative Care Queensland, Brisbane Domiciliary Services, Brisbane Palliative Care Specialist Services, including Mt Olivet Hospice Services, and the Queensland Health Safe Medicine Practice Unit. The subcommittee began the development of the *Guidelines*.

In October 2007, the Brisbane South Palliative Care Collaborative (BSPCC) finalised the *Guidelines*, after further consultation with the Queensland Nursing Council, Queensland Nurses Union, Centre for Palliative Care Research and Education, Office of the Adult Guardian and the Environmental Health Unit, Queensland Health. The *Guidelines* are compliant with the *Health (Drug & Poisons) Regulation 1996* and the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000* and the *Powers of Attorney Act 1998*. They are also inclusive of the legislative provisions contained within the 1998 amendment of the *Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulation 1996* that addresses medication(s) administered outside an institutional setting and relates specifically to lay carers.

As the *Guidelines* have now been endorsed by Queensland Health the process of state-wide distribution can begin.