

# Health risks from medicine misuse

Australians' blasé attitude towards medicines is leading to further health problems for many and is placing avoidable pressure on our health system.

Artarmon pharmacist Nick Logan says: "Pharmacy sales of over the counter pain killers containing codeine were restricted in May this year because misuse was resulting in an unnecessary number of serious side effects and hospitalisations. Codeine has numerous side effects and interactions with other medication as well as its potential for dependence."

An article published in Medical Journal of Australia has detailed serious health effects in patients who misused pain killers containing ibuprofen and codeine. It notes more than half a million Australians

use combination pain relief products for non-medical purposes.

Karen Kaye, acting CEO of NPS, an independent organisation enabling people to be medicine-wise, says people need to start thinking more seriously about non-prescription medicines.

"Just because a medicine can be purchased without a prescription doesn't mean it's risk-free," Kaye said.

"Modern pharmacy staff are trained to answer your questions regarding pain relief medication. I would encourage people to discuss side effects, interactions and appropriate doses of all pain medication, no matter how safe they are regarded, with their pharmacist or doctor." ■