

Media release

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Liquid opioid safety success in WA leads latest JPPR

The successful rollout of a safer and more efficient approach to managing unit doses of liquid opioids in Western Australian hospitals leads the latest issue of the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA)'s flagship journal, [available online](#).

In the June 2023 issue of the [Journal of Pharmacy Practice and Research \(JPPR\)](#), researchers from Perth's Fiona Stanley Hospital report on the implementation and outcomes of switching to smaller unit dose pod (UDP) measurements for liquid opioids, from larger multidose bottles (MDBs).

In '[Developing a unit dose approach to managing oral opioid liquids in an Australian hospital](#)', researchers Bint et. al. note the successful pilot phase saw UDPs effectively mitigate a key risk associated with MDBs: discrepancies in liquid opioid inventory caused by factors such as measurement losses, overfill variance, gradual contamination, and potential theft.

'Between May 2017 and May 2018, 3,062 UDPs were distributed with nil discrepancies, and 133 MDBs were distributed with 16 discrepancies (0% vs 12%). Most staff (92%) reported more efficient inventory counts and improved confidence in product integrity for UDPs.'

The rollout saw staff administrative overhead required to manage reportable discrepancies from volume errors 'essentially eliminated' and, by late 2020, UDPs were in use across 19 hospitals across the state, with annual use exceeding 33,000 units.

SHPA President Tom Simpson says the study illustrates the crucial role of hospital pharmacy toward the twin goals of improving patient safety and service efficiency.

'Pharmacists and technicians working in specialty roles in hospital teams have direct insight into the changes required to deliver safer care while maximising the use of limited resources.

'We welcome this exemplary quality improvement outcome in WA, and continue our call for system-wide changes to minimise risks associated with opioids, as highlighted in our landmark [Reducing opioid-related harm](#) report.

'More broadly, this dedication to the safest and highest quality of pharmacy practice – placing the patient at the centre – drives our organisation, and SHPA will continue to advocate for commensurate funding for specialty pharmacist and technician positions in all states and territories to ensure growth in hospital and healthcare funding translates into better health outcomes for all Australians.'

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About SHPA

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national, professional organisation for the 6,100+ Hospital Pharmacists, and their Hospital Pharmacist Intern and Hospital Pharmacy Technician colleagues working across Australia's health system, advocating for their pivotal role improving the safety and quality of medicines use. Embedded in multidisciplinary medical teams and equipped with exceptional medicines management expertise, SHPA members are progressive advocates for clinical excellence, committed to evidence-based practice and passionate about patient care.

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