

Rural GPs encouraged to take up training to help patients with alcohol and drug use problems - Royal Australian College of GPs

16 Feb 2021 5:30 AM

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is encouraging more rural and remote GPs to update their skills using the latest research to support patients with alcohol and other drug (AOD) use problems in their communities.

Under the \$7.9 million initiative funded by the Federal Government the RACGP is delivering the Alcohol and Other Drugs GP Education [Program](#), which is tailored to meet the needs of GPs in all corners of Australia.

The program encourages participation from rural and remote GPs and includes:

- essential skills training to provide an update for GPs wanting to improve their approach to conversations about alcohol and other drug use. It is now available to all RACGP members through a self-directed e-learning module on gplearning
- treatment skills training, which is being delivered via “AOD live” online workshops and self-directed e-learning modules. This training improves a GP’s ability to talk about AOD use with patients and decide on an appropriate plan
- advance skills training for those GPs who already have a good grounding in AOD care and want to address specific AOD-related challenges in their community. These GPs are required to take on a leadership role and share what they have learnt with their practice colleagues.

RACGP President Dr Karen Price strongly encouraged more rural and remote GPs to take up the training.

“This valuable training opportunity will help rural and remote communities across Australia, and we are really keen to get more GPs outside of major cities involved,” she said.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has been a very trying time for many people and, as a result, substance use problems have worsened. So, there is no more important time for GPs in towns across the nation to put their hand up and further improve their skills.

“Helping people with alcohol and drug use issues is not easy and this training can make a real difference. For those GPs who are already experienced in this field, I suggest taking up the advanced skills training and spreading your expertise amongst other GPs.

“As the late Dr Harry Nespolon said last year - we can’t control how long this pandemic will last but we can control our primary care response to it. Those are wise words, so please do not hesitate to take up this AOD training.

“We know that general practice already has access to a range of evidence-based resources. But what we realised is that there are gaps in providing training on practical ways that GPs can support patients who find it difficult to talk about their alcohol intake, misuse of prescribed medications or other drug use. This training addresses that gap and once again I encourage GPs to seize this opportunity.”

Chair of the RACGP Addiction Medicine network Dr Hester Wilson said that the program comes at a vital time.

“There are many reasons why patients from different walks of life turn to alcohol and other drugs. Substance use is a complex subject and no two patients are the same; however, we know that this pandemic and the resulting stresses placed on people is a factor in problematic substance use,” she said.

“The good news is that training initiatives such as this can help our GPs start a conversation with their patients about alcohol and drug use and lead them on a path towards a healthier life.

“I encourage rural and remote GPs to take up this training right away. Video conferencing software is being used to deliver online training sessions so that doctors living outside of our cities do not miss out on this great learning opportunity.

“We know that training up GPs outside of major cities is particularly important. That is because people in rural and remote regions are particularly at risk for drug and alcohol misuse. GPs working in some of these areas are sometimes isolated and treating patients with complex morbidities.

“They are often working without real-time support from colleagues or experienced allied health professionals and it is essential that they are equipped with the training they need to help their patients.”

The program will help GPs:

- talk openly to their patients about alcohol and other drug use
- work collaboratively with colleagues to develop a whole-of-practice approach to the prescribing of pharmaceuticals to treat pain, insomnia and anxiety
- implement best practice approaches to safely and effectively support patients presenting with alcohol and other drug use problems to minimise harm and improve health and wellbeing
- learn about effective AOD patient assessment, harm minimisation, withdrawal and weaning as well as pharmacotherapy options (e.g. methadone treatment) and treatment pathways.

The RACGP is collaborating closely with PHNs, Local Health Districts and other alcohol and other drug treatment service providers to ensure local treatment pathways are promoted. You can learn more [here](#).

RACGP President Dr Karen Price and Chair of the RACGP Addiction Medicine network Dr Hester Wilson are available for comment.

Media contacts:

John Ronan

Media Adviser

0428 122 357

media@racgp.org.au

Ally Francis

Media Adviser

0499 555 712

media@racgp.org.au

Follow us on Twitter: [@RACGP](#) and [Facebook](#).