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MEDIA RELEASE

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NICS Scholar delivers improvements in anticoagulant use

Many lives and several million dollars could be saved every year by improving the use of anticoagulant medications according to a National Health and Medical Research Council NICS PhD Scholar, Dr Luke Bereznicki.

Dr Bereznicki, a Lecturer in Pharmacy at the University of Tasmania, says the under, over or misuse of anticoagulant medications in Australia has continued to rise over the last 25 years, resulting in avoidable complications and hospital deaths.

'10 per cent of all deaths in hospitalised patients are due to preventable blood clots or venous thromboembolism (VTE), yet anticoagulants are not always routinely prescribed. Similarly, up to 10 per cent of people commencing warfarin therapy develop life threatening complications, such as major bleeding, within three months of hospital discharge. Self-monitoring of warfarin therapy has emerged as the optimal method to manage patients on blood thinning medications in the community, but it is not widely practised in Australia.'

Dr Bereznicki developed a series of implementation projects as part of his PhD studies to address these important evidence-practice gaps in selected Tasmanian public hospitals. The role of pharmacists within these projects was to provide education, support and training to both patients and medical staff to improve anticoagulant use.

These projects resulted in dramatic changes in practice in the participating hospitals. In one study, the appropriate use of agents to prevent VTE increased from only 10 per cent to more than 70 per cent in hospitalised, elderly medical patients. In a second study, the rate of complications such as major bleeding and stroke occurring within three months of hospital discharge was reduced from 11 per cent to just 2 per cent. This was a result of better use of hospital guidelines for warfarin therapy together with the provision of more detailed information to general practitioners.

Dr Bereznicki acknowledges the importance of the collaboration between the hospital's clinicians and the pharmacist as a key to the success of these projects. He also believes the projects highlight the important role the hospital pharmacist plays in complementing the work of other health care professionals in educating patients about medication use. 'My projects have proven the value of pharmacy in delivering measurable improvements in patient care in important areas of medication safety and have provided the knowledge and impetus for change in other hospitals across Australia' said Dr Bereznicki.

Dr Bereznicki's PhD was supported by the NHMRC's National Institute of Clinical Studies (NICS) and has been awarded by the University of Tasmania.

Release ends.

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Note to editors

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