

Doctor surrenders registration, disqualified for 18 months after long-term self-prescribing



Key messages from the case

Doctors are expected to avoid self-prescribing and to seek independent objective medical care when necessary, especially if they know or suspect they have a health condition that could affect their judgement or performance. In the case of one practitioner, dishonesty and failure to comply with conditions led to her disqualification.

Details of the decision

Self-prescribing

Dr C became addicted to sleeping tablets while a university student and once she became a registered medical practitioner, forged prescriptions for various Schedule 4 medications.

She was reported to the Medical Board. The Board imposed conditions that she attend regular drug screening, not self-administer S4 or S8 medications or S1 drugs, and obtain treatment from an addiction specialist. She breached these conditions on multiple occasions and continued to self-prescribe, forged prescriptions using her supervisor's prescription pad and lied to the Board when she failed to attend screening tests.

Dr C's registration was suspended.

Eventually she sought treatment for her addiction and agreed to surrender her registration, acknowledging that she was still not competent to practise. She conceded that she was guilty of unsatisfactory professional conduct and professional misconduct.

Outcome

Given the concessions Dr C made, the tribunal had narrow issues to consider. It noted that if she had still been registered it would have cancelled

her registration. It ordered that she be disqualified from applying for reregistration for 18 months.

The tribunal also made a non-publication order of the practitioner's name.

Key lessons

Avoid self-prescribing and seek independent medical care whenever necessary. All doctors are encouraged to have their own treating general practitioner.

Doctors who self-prescribe often lack objectivity, and in many cases their self-prescribing is not appropriate treatment.

Having an illness or health issue does not necessarily mean a doctor will be unable to practise or that they will be reported to the medical regulator.

However, if a practitioner has an impairment that is placing patients or the public at substantial risk of harm they may be managed through various regulatory processes, and this may include conditions or monitoring. Dishonesty and/or failure to comply with conditions imposed by the regulator may lead to suspension or deregistration.

Self-prescribing or self-administering schedule 4 and schedule 8 medications is against the law in some Australian jurisdictions, and health departments have enhanced their monitoring of this.

It is an offence to forge a prescription, fraudulently alter a prescription, or present a known forged or altered prescription to obtain a drug.

Prescription forgery is not only illegal, but can also put patients at risk through inaccurate medication records and may also put colleagues at risk of being reported for inappropriate prescribing.

References and further reading

Medical Council of New South Wales – [Guideline for self-treating and treating family members](#)

Ahpra – [Making a mandatory notification](#)

Avant factsheet – [Treating family members, friends or staff](#)

Avant wellbeing resources – [Substance abuse and the medical profession](#)

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