



# ELECTRONIC TRANSFER OF PRESCRIPTIONS

## Improving quality and safety in prescribing and medication management

Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions provides a method of digitally creating, signing, storing and dispensing prescriptions. This provides an integrated model of care, by linking a GP clinical information system with a pharmacy dispensing system.

All electronic prescriptions are digitally signed and encrypted using Medicare Australia issued PKI security keys to ensure that the transfers of the prescriptions and medication charts are safe and secure. The project provides an alternative to current paper-based prescription management methods.

The Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions project is unique to the Northern Territory and is the first of its kind anywhere in Australia.

### What are the benefits of the Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions?

*Quality:* Reduces the risk of illegible prescriptions, non-formulary medications, potential drug interactions, incorrect dosages and renewal requests.

*Safety:* PKI keys ensure the safe and secure transfer of electronic prescriptions.

### Will the patient's privacy be protected?

Technologies used in the Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions comply with the National E-Health Transition Authority standards, the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and Medicare Australia guidelines for privacy and security.

### What legislative changes have occurred to support Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions?

National legislative changes were enacted on 1 March 2007 that provided for digitally-signed and encrypted prescriptions to hold the same legal standing as physically signed prescriptions in relation to PBS claiming.

The Northern Territory supports the approval of dispensing digitally signed and encrypted prescriptions and in April 2008 became the first jurisdiction in Australia use this e-health solution.

Other State and other Territory Governments are now reviewing legislation for the purposes of dispensing digitally signed and encrypted prescriptions.

### Who is involved in the Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions project?

The Top End Division of General Practice has consulted with the following key stakeholders throughout each implementation Phase:

- GPs
- pharmacists
- Aboriginal Medical Services
- residential aged care facilities
- Pharmacy Guild
- Department of Health and Ageing
- Medicare Australia
- Regulators of the *Poisons and Dangerous Drug Act*
- privacy regulators
- consumers

The phased approach to the implementation that has ensured a smooth transition of electronic technology into the clinical environment, whilst ensuring clinician and consumer acceptability.

## What are the phases of the Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions project?

### Phase 1

Phase 1 was implemented in December 2006. This Phase was limited to its scope to provide for an environment that could test technologies to digitally-sign, encrypt and securely transfer the e-prescriptions.

The participants in Phase 1 were the Terrace Gardens Residential Aged Care Facility, Stuart Park Pharmacy and the GPs that provide health care for the residents.

Stakeholder feedback of this Phase was very positive, with stated benefits at every stage.

### Phase 2

Phase 2 was implemented in April 2008 into the broader community-prescribing sector. In this Phase a central prescription server is being used for storing digitally signed and encrypted prescriptions until the prescription is dispensed.

Patients are provided with a digitally-signed paper prescription that contains a barcode created by the GP's prescribing software. Patients can then choose to present the paper prescription to any pharmacy in the Northern Territory. However only the pharmacies participating in this Phase are able to electronically retrieve the prescription data from the central server and import this directly into their dispensing software.

A GP practice and two pharmacies in Darwin are participating in this Phase.

A full evaluation of this Phase is expected after the trial runs for 6 months. Based on the outcomes of this, the Phase may be expanded to include other GPs, pharmacies with integration into the respective clinical information systems.

### Phase 3

Phase 3 will see the further development of both Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions and Advanced Medication Management as integrated e-health solutions for the aged care sector. This will enable digital-signing processes to be utilised at the Terrace Gardens Aged Care facility.

This Phase is expected to go live in May 2008. Expected benefits include improved quality and safety in prescribing and medication management in the aged care sector.

### eHealthNT... *linking the health system*

eHealthNT is a program of the Department of Health and Community Services that is implementing leading edge e-health solutions to improve health care outcomes across the Northern Territory.

Our program partner, the Top End Division of General Practice, is implementing the Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions, which is managed by the Health Provider eXchange team.

### For further information

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