Sources of information and to support medication prescribing practice and preferences in continuing education: Findings from a national survey of Nurse Practitioners in Australia

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Background and methods: In 2010 Australian NPs were invited to participate in a national online survey exploring medication-prescribing behaviors. Potential participants were invited to complete the web-based survey through emails distributed via the Australian College of Nurse Practitioners (ACNP) list server and NPs were encouraged to distribute the survey URL to other NPs who may not have received the ACNP emails.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to document the sources of medication information (both paper-based and electronic) utilised by NPs and document NPs’ perceived usefulness of such resources in supporting prescribing practice. An additional aim was also to determine NPs’ preferences for continuing education regarding quality use of medications (QUM).

Research participants: A total of 209 endorsed NPs responded to the survey, constituting approximately 40% of the NPs authorised in Australia at the time. Of these, 90% were practicing in the public sector, 80% were females, and 56% had been practicing as RNs for more than 15 years. Over 3/4 of respondents had been authorised as NPs for less than five years.

Findings: Most frequently used sources of medication information were MIMS (92%), Australian Medications Handbook (88.5%) and Therapeutic Guidelines (85%). Electronic sources of information (61%) were used more commonly than paper-based versions (39% overall). Other resources including Australian Prescriber, Cochrane database and PBS were used by less than 50% of respondents. Only 34% of respondents reported having undertaken a continuing education activity related to QUM in the past year.

Conclusion: These results show important changes in the way Australian NPs receive information on medications and their preferences in relation to continuing medication education. Given the recent legislative changes in regard to access to PBS, these trends herald both opportunities and challenges for NPs in the future.