

Updated Asthma Handbook Clarifies Confusion on New Asthma and COPD Drugs

Development of treatment plans for asthma is about to get easier for General Practitioners, with the newly updated Australian Asthma Handbook clarifying facts on the latest medications on the market for asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Released today by the National Asthma Council Australia, version 1.2 of the Australian Asthma Handbook has been developed by an interdisciplinary team of medical experts and incorporates feedback from primary care providers.

Professor Amanda Barnard, Chair of the National Asthma Council Australia Guidelines Committee and General Practitioner said:

“New asthma and COPD drugs have come on the market over the last two years, and doctors have expressed confusion about when to use which medication as well as the long-term safety of various options.

“The updated Australian Asthma Handbook provides factual information on all the latest medications, including what conditions they treat, how they differ from existing drugs and clarification of their suitability for long versus short-term use.”

Building on the Handbook’s ground-breaking online publication format, the update also includes new website features, including printable PDFs of each section of the Handbook.

Alongside the Handbook revision, the National Asthma Council Australia has updated its popular *Asthma and COPD Medications* wall chart. As well as including all the latest inhalers available in Australia, the updated version specifies each medication’s current PBS reimbursement status for asthma and/or COPD.

A new *Allergic Rhinitis Treatments* wall chart has also been developed in the same style. The new chart shows the main intranasal treatment options available in Australia for allergic rhinitis. Effective management of allergic rhinitis is an important component of good asthma control. Prescription-only, pharmacy-only and non-prescription products are all included.

These two wall charts are intended as useful education tools for health professionals to help with identification and explanation of different treatments.

Highlights of the updated Australian Asthma Handbook (version 1.2):

1) Consensus advice against use of e-cigarettes, recommending that people with asthma should be discouraged from using e-cigarettes, even for smoking cessation, until further evidence on the risks is available.

2) Clarification of rationale for long-term use of low-dose inhaled corticosteroids, emphasising that this is the recommended treatment for most adults with asthma and aims to reduce risk of flare-ups, even if day-to-day symptoms are infrequent.

3) Evidence-based advice on the roles and uses of new add-on treatment options, including mepolizumab, omalizumab and tiotropium, plus new specific allergen immunotherapy preparations

4) Update of inhaler technique and spacer priming advice to reflect the Asthma Council's recent information paper on this topic, noting that most patients do not use inhaler devices correctly, providing guidance on how to improve patient technique, and introducing a new table to help clarify which spacers require priming before first use.

5) Increased emphasis on written asthma action plans, highlighting the central recommendation that every adult and child with asthma should have a personalised written asthma action plan

PDF copies of the *Asthma and COPD Medications* wall chart and *Allergic Rhinitis Treatments* wall chart are available at: www.nationalasthma.org.au

The updated *Australian Asthma Handbook version 1.2*, including a full list of amendments, is available at: www.astmahandbook.org.au. The corresponding Quick Reference Guide v1.2 is also downloadable as a PDF from the website. Please note that printed copies of this Guide will not be published.

The National Asthma Council Australia maintained strict editorial independence in developing these resources. The Handbook's revision was partially supported by unrestricted educational grants from sponsors AstraZeneca, Mundipharma and Novartis. Revision of the *Asthma and COPD Medications* chart was supported by AstraZeneca, Boehringer-Ingelheim, GlaxoSmithKline, Mundipharma and Novartis. Development of the *Allergic Rhinitis Treatments* chart was supported by Meda Pharmaceuticals.

Respective sponsor representatives will assist with the distribution of the two wall charts, delivering them to GPs, practice nurses and pharmacists nationally over the coming months.

For more information on asthma, visit the National Asthma Council Australia website:

www.nationalasthma.org.au

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For further information, or to arrange an interview with a National Asthma Council Australia spokesperson, please contact:

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