



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### CCC investigation reveals systemic failures in major public hospitals

A Corruption and Crime Commission investigation into the theft of an “extraordinary amount” of addictive narcotics from two major public hospitals has highlighted systemic issues regarding the supply and management of Schedule 8 drugs in public hospitals.

The [\*Report on the Supply and Management of Schedule 8 Controlled Drugs at Certain Public Hospitals in Western Australia\*](#), which was tabled in State Parliament today, follows the conviction of a senior pharmacist from Fiona Stanley Hospital in 2016 for stealing as a servant and possession of prohibited drugs to feed his addiction to the Schedule 8 drug hydromorphone - which is likened to heroin. The investigation discovered that the senior pharmacist became addicted to, and began stealing opioids, while employed at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital.

Importantly, the Commission revealed that the systems and controls in place to manage Schedule 8 drugs at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital were "inadequate and easy to circumvent without detection". The Commission also discovered that Fiona Stanley Hospital had not identified "obvious warning signs", meaning serious misconduct was only exposed when a colleague raised suspicions with hospital authorities.

Between 2014 and 2016 hospital drug supply systems were able to be circumvented “as a consequence of inadequacies in checks, balances, reconciliation processes, and basic audit procedures”.

The report reveals disturbing gaps in the management and control of Schedule 8 drugs at public hospitals, and highlights a number of risk areas, including:

- having after-hours access to the pharmacy safe;
- not reconciling supply by the pharmacy and receipt at a ward or unit;
- substandard practices around the use of requisition forms; and
- inadequate management of registers.

The Commission acknowledged that work was underway at Fiona Stanley Hospital and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital to prepare new policy, procedures and practical guidance for staff handling Section 8 drugs. However, a key policy reform approved by hospital management in September 2016 has still not been implemented and mandated quarterly audits are yet to be conducted.

While the hospitals maintained that necessary changes remain "in transition" and a "work in progress", the Commission believes that serious misconduct and corruption risks in Western Australian hospitals remains significant until this work is completed.

A number of other inquiries and reports into the management of controlled drugs in public hospitals in recent years have made similar findings and recommendations, which are still awaiting implementation. These include:

- **April 2010** - A Corruption and Crime Commission Report [\*Misconduct Handling Procedures in the Western Australian Public Sector: WA Health\*](#) found “serious, identifiable misconduct



risks” in the management of Schedule 4 and Schedule 8 drugs at Perth hospitals and a regional health service posed “a risk to patient safety”. The report said “WA Health agreed the report highlighted the need for a “whole-of-Health” approach to managing misconduct”.

- **June 2012** - The Western Australian Auditor General's Report *[Purchase and Management of Pharmaceuticals in Public Hospitals](#)* warned “... non-compliance with mandated controls mean it is still too easy for pharmaceuticals to go missing and for losses to go undetected... hospitals must be carefully managed to prevent unauthorised access and use...strongly associated with addiction and abuse...theft leading to illicit sale and distribution of pharmaceuticals”... and “hospital staff working while under the influence of pharmaceuticals, which is a risk to patient care.”
- **September 2013** Coroner’s reports handed down together into the deaths of two nurses employed at Royal Perth Hospital and King Edward Memorial Hospital, caused by self-injection with Schedule 4 and Schedule 8 drugs which had been accessed at work, called for improved security for the storage and management of restricted narcotics in public hospitals.

This report makes recommendations in 10 areas relating to the supply and management of Schedule 8 drugs to reduce the likelihood of serious misconduct and corruption occurring in Western Australian public hospitals.

A copy of the *Report on the Supply and Management of Schedule 8 Controlled Drugs at Certain Public Hospitals in Western Australia* is available on the [Corruption and Crime Commission Website](#).

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