

# First Australia-wide e-scripts launched to improve patient care and safety

GPs and medical specialists around Australia today started using e-scripts on the first Australia-wide platform for electronic prescriptions, called eRx Script Exchange, launched to provide a better and safer health care experience for all Australians.

eRx Script Exchange is an industry-led initiative to enable GPs and medical specialists to send prescriptions electronically through a secure, encrypted gateway, for later retrieval from a patient's pharmacy of choice anywhere in Australia.

Doctor Tim Denton, a GP in a rural practice in Victoria, and one of the first GPs to use eRx Script Exchange, sees significant value in the development of electronic prescribing.

“With electronic prescribing some of the more vexed areas of patient care are greatly strengthened, namely that of prescription management. This will provide a simple but effective solution for such issues as patients losing scripts, doctor shopping or being informed when prescriptions are altered after inpatient or outpatient reviews.”

“Electronic prescribing also represents another big step towards the ultimate goal of an encrypted online comprehensive medical history. One of the major problems with efficient medical care is inadequate communication, whether that be after discharge from hospital, outpatient visits or transfer of patients from one practitioner to another. As we move into the age of primary health care teams centred around GP care, optimal communication is critical.”

With 5000 pharmacies around Australia dispensing on average 100-200 scripts a day - a total of 200 million scripts every year - electronic prescriptions provide a significant opportunity to strengthen patient safety and confidence. They:

- Reduce the potential risks associated with dispensing and administering medications
- Potentially provide GPs with vital feedback about whether patient medication has been dispensed
- Improve accuracy of dispensing, which improves safety and increases patient confidence that they are getting the correct medications
- Dispensing time is reduced by up to 3 minutes as a result of not having to re-key patient information for repeats and refills

Speaking at the Australian Pharmacy Professional Conference, Kos Sclavos, National President, Pharmacy Guild of Australia, says, “This is an historic moment for Australian health care. A platform for e-scripts is a vital piece of health infrastructure, creating immediate safety benefits for patients, as well as a better standard of shared care between GPs and pharmacists. It paves the way for further improvements to delivery of care through facilitation of individual electronic health records, based on individual consent.”

eRx Script Exchange is endorsed by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, which is funding the first 10 million transactions.



Graham Cunningham, Chairman, eRx Script Exchange, says, "eRx Script Exchange protects patient choice about where they would like to get scripts filled, at the same time ensuring that patient information and medicine details are fully encrypted from the moment they leave the GP through to the time they are dispensed at the pharmacy. Now that a secure and reliable national platform for e-scripts is in place, we look forward to working together with government and industry to make e-scripts available for all Australians."

eRx Script Exchange works in parallel with the existing paper-based process:

- GPs and medical specialists prescribe as usual (but can opt out)
- The patient walks away with a paper script printed with an eRx Script Exchange barcode
- An electronic version of the prescription is automatically encrypted and sent to the secure, central eRx gateway
- The patient can take the script to any pharmacy, when they are ready.
- The pharmacist scans the eRx barcode. The script is retrieved into dispensing software within seconds, with no re-typing.

All data is fully encrypted from the time it leaves the doctor to the time the pharmacy dispenses it, using third party security certificates and current HeSA certificates as used by GPs and pharmacists for Online Claiming for PBS. The patient's chosen GP and pharmacist are the only people who can see the prescription data. eRx is not able to view or analyse prescription data.

Dr Frank Pyefinch, a practicing GP and CEO of medical software company Best Practice, has been instrumental in making e-scripts available to GPs as a result of integration with the company's clinical software. According to Dr Pyefinch, "Electronic scripts are a significant step in improving patient care for health care providers. For the first time, GPs and medical specialists can now send e-scripts, with the knowledge that patients can safely have their medication dispensed anywhere around Australia."

eRx Script Exchange is being developed with the e-health expertise of Simpl New Zealand and Microsoft Australia, and rolled out throughout Australia in collaboration with software vendors including Best Practice medical software, Simple Retail, Fred Health, and minfos®.

Simpl CEO Bennett Medary says the eRx project is an excellent example of the health sector taking the lead in a health connectivity initiative where the desire to improve patient outcomes is top priority.

"Health connectivity should be all about the patient; finding ways to improve their relationships with the health community so that they can live longer, healthier lives. We are committed to using our connectivity expertise and partnerships anywhere in the world where we can improve patient-health relationships."

Dr David Dembo, Leader - Health and Human Services, Microsoft Australia, says, "Microsoft is playing a key role in the eRx project by providing an open-source, standards-based Health Connection Engine. This platform not only supports the industry messaging standards, including the emerging NEHTA specifications but is also a lower risk, scalable platform that enables the objectives and aims of eRx."

Visit [www.ernx.com.au](http://www.ernx.com.au) to register for updates about eRx Script Exchange. To view demonstrations of the electronic prescription process, visit the eRx Script Exchange stands at:

- the **Australian Pharmacy Professionals Conference** on the Gold Coast from 2-5 April 2009 (stands 145,151)
- the **General Practitioner Conference and Exhibition** in Sydney from 22-24 May 2009 (stand 1021)

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