The most common aspect of health-related behaviour is the use of medicines. The patient-doctor relationship is always associated with the expectation of a prescription consisting of medicines. The health care provider also has no doubts that modern remedies save lives and are also the most convenient and cost-efficient way of treatment. It is also well-established that most medicines are inaptly prescribed and used. This tends to happen both ways; overuse of certain drugs and the underutilization of others. In addition to this, problems directly related to drug therapy account for a large number of hospital admissions-most of which are preventable.

The concept of rational use of medicines and that of essential drugs are inextricably linked. Countries spend a major part of their health budgets on provision of medicines and the key issues that concern policy-makers are geared towards containing the cost of medicines and to safeguard their quality. Australia was one of the foremost countries to establish a service to ensure “equitable access to high quality, safe and effective medicines”. The National Prescribing Service (NPS) was set up in 1998 with the purpose of ensuring Quality Use of Medicines with the vision of becoming the “most trusted source of independent information about medicines for Australians”. It has now progressed to become NPS Limited-an independent entity.

The website of this non-profit organization, not associated with the government or the pharmaceutical industry, is http://www.nps.org.au. The home page of the website targets three links-one for health professionals, the second for consumers and the third for the media-all essential partners in ensuring quality use of medicines. The page for health professionals has numerous links for excellent evidence-based resources namely: NPS News which publishes referenced information on drug treatment of common diseases and related issues; NPS RADAR (Rational Assessment of Drugs And Research)-free updates on new drugs and indications as approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and Current Prescribing Practice which seeks to publish guidelines based on feedback from prescribers. The link on Topics and Resources takes one to a drop down menu with a selection of varied topics that are linked to the main repository. Resources include common drugs and diseases like analgesics, antibiotics, diabetes, and hypertension amongst others. General topics like polypharmacy, newer drugs, drug use in elderly, lifestyle education and smoking cessation are also addressed.

The page for consumers is differently oriented and tends to give information in a simple manner. The links include, Medimate-a highly informative brochure on use of medicines that also includes a record keeping tool on medication, medicine guides on individual drugs (Consumer Medicine Information), Medicine Talk- a newsletter and a number of other links on community activities in the quality use of medicines.
The page for the media consists of press releases and news that are related to activities of NPS. A few items commenting on the use of drugs that are currently in use or are controversial in nature are also highlighted.

The search facility is based on the category of information sought and quite precise in its results. It also includes contents of the Australian Prescriber, an independent publication of the NPS.

The NPS website embodies the philosophy of promoting rational and evidence-based use of medicines. The unique design that seeks to address both the health professionals and consumers through the same portal encourages a healthy and informed dialogue between the patient and prescriber. Those interested in educating consumers, setting up a drug information centre or teaching about medicines can gain a considerable insight into the provision of evidence-based information from the contents of this website.

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