



## Putting 'U' back into QUM

How do nurses influence health policy to do with medicines? What is the 'quality use of medicines', and how does it affect nurses? ANF Federal Professional Officer, **Fiona Armstrong**, reports.

As a member of the National Prescribing Service (NPS), the ANF has the opportunity to contribute to, and influence medicines policy through the NPS. The NPS is an independent, non-profit organisation (albeit funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing) which acts as the service agency for national medicines policy, and aims to provide independent information about medicines for all Australians. One of its major programs is the *Quality Use of Medicines Program* (QUM), specifically intended to 'provide accurate, balanced, evidence-based information and services to health professionals and the community'.

The central themes of the QUM

program emphasise the importance of:

- selecting medication management options wisely;
- choosing suitable medicines if a medicine is considered necessary; and
- using medicines safely and effectively.

While this partnership with NPS has always included nurses (as well as GPs, pharmacists, specialists, other health professionals, government, the pharmaceutical industry, consumer organisations and the community), there is an increasing awareness at NPS of the important role nurses play in the administration and management of medicines, as well as patient education, and now, with

the endorsement of many nurse practitioners throughout the states and territories, the prescribing of medicines.

The QUM program is not simply for prescribing health professionals; in its purest form, this program hopes to help all Australians to achieve better health and economic outcomes. The promotion of generic medicines is an important part of this goal, as are the public health benefits of safe and effective use of medicines. So where do 'u' fit in? Well, the ANF is advocating the increased involvement of nurses in medicines policy, and at the recent meeting proposed several ways of doing this. These include targeting nurses in the development of some of the educational

materials and online programs offered by NPS; interfacing with the providers of vocational educational training courses, to incorporate QUM principles into training for enrolled nurses undertaking medication management training; extending to prescribing nurses the use of resources already available to other health care practitioners, such as the Pharmaceutical Decision Support tool; and promoting the Quality Use of Medicines program through nursing publications, such as the *ANJ*. The ANF will be working to encourage the consultation of nurses in this process, so if you get a chance to be involved, through your ANF branch or specialty organisation, we encourage you to do so.

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