

# MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **Medication safety website aims to reduce medication errors**

An innovative e-learning initiative developed at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) has taken a step closer to engaging health care professionals and students in better medication safety, following the signing of a commercial agreement with NPS - better choices, better health (formerly the National Prescribing Service).

MedSafety™ is a website-based innovation created by PhD student James Reeve under the supervision of Professor Gregory Peterson of the School of Pharmacy and Associate Professor Janet Vial of the School of Medicine.

The website offers informative case studies, learning modules, quizzes and a discussion forum for the training of pharmacists, doctors and nurses in medication error prevention – a problem estimated to occur with 5-8 percent of all prescribed medications.

Medication errors are most often associated with home care following hospitalisation (transition care), certain high risk medicines, residential aged care, and prescriptions written by health professionals new to the task.

Professor Gregory Peterson, who leads the Unit for Medication Outcomes Research & Education (UMORE) within the School of Pharmacy at the UTAS, said medication errors can arise for a range of systematic or human reasons including, for example, mistakes in administration, transcription, prescription, dispensing or recording of allergy data.

“Medication error rates are reported with variable levels of detail and precision, and while only a fraction of these become clinically significant, the need for an easily accessible way doctors, nurses and pharmacists to share and update their knowledge about medication safety is paramount,” Prof. Peterson said.

“About five percent of all hospital admissions in Australia are estimated to be medication-related, equating to around 200,000 such admissions each year and a direct cost to the healthcare system of over \$800 million, so an opportunity like this to reduce those figures is really exciting.”

NPS CEO, Dr Lynn Weekes, said the medication safety focus of the MedSafety website complements existing professional programs.

“Medication errors can occur at a number of stages during the medicine process, but most errors are avoidable. The resources on the MedSafety website guide health professionals and health professional students in

medication prescribing, dispensing and administering. These will be integrated into our quality use of medicines work,” Dr Weekes said.

The agreement was the first one negotiated on behalf of the University by its research commercialisation partner, UniQuest, ahead of several projects in the expanding collaboration pipeline.

University of Tasmania Vice-Chancellor Professor Daryl Le Grew said today such innovative projects demonstrated the excellence in research and its application at UTAS.

“The University strives to set the best environment for innovation across its research strengths and this is an excellent example of where such ideas can be fostered and grow into practical use,” Prof. Le Grew said.

For UniQuest’s Managing Director, David Henderson, the deal demonstrated what could be achieved when university-based organisations collaborated to transfer research-based innovations into practical solutions for benefit of the wider community.

“UniQuest has a strong track record of helping researchers share their ideas and expertise with organisations that then take something like the MedSafety website and develop it further and provide it directly to the people who need it most,” Mr Henderson said.

“With the support of UniQuest’s experienced commercialisation team, the University has achieved an outcome that will boost efforts to reduce the impact of medication errors, not just in Australia but potentially around the world.”

The MedSafety website will be available when content updates are completed and the resources are made available through NPS for health professionals and health professional students.

**For more information and media interviews contact:**

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## **About the Unit for Medication Outcomes Research & Education (UMORE)**

The nationally recognised and highly successful Unit for Medication Outcomes Research and Education (UMORE) was established within the UTAS School of Pharmacy in 2003. Its staff members include pharmacists, psychologists, economists and IT specialists. UMORE's research has a strong focus on the development, application and evaluation of information and communications technology solutions to improve the safety and efficacy of health care delivery, including the use of medications. Over the past seven years, UMORE has attracted external research funding of more than \$13 million.

## **About NPS**

Formerly known as the National Prescribing Service, NPS was established by the Federal Government in March 1998 as the first national organisation to undertake work in quality use of medicines, which is a central objective of Australia's National Medicines Policy. For more information go to [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

## **About UniQuest**

Established by The University of Queensland in 1984, UniQuest is widely recognised as one of Australia's largest and most successful university commercialisation groups. With more than 80 staff and group revenues exceeding A\$320 million in the past five years, the company is also benchmarked in the top tier of technology transfer worldwide. It has created more than 60 companies, and since 2000 UniQuest and its start-ups have raised more than \$340 million to take university technologies to market. UniQuest commercialises innovations developed at The University of Queensland and its commercialisation partner institutions: the University of Wollongong, University of Technology Sydney, James Cook University, University of Tasmania, the Mater Medical Research Institute and two ARC Centres of Excellence. For more information about UniQuest, please visit: [www.uniquet.com.au](http://www.uniquet.com.au)

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