



The Royal Australasian
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Ketamine: a world view needed

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Tomorrow, Assistant Health Minister Fiona Nash will vote at the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs on whether to schedule Ketamine, an issue being examined by the Commission because of concern about the use of Ketamine as an illicit recreational drug.

Leading international health peak bodies, the World Medical Association and the World Federation of Societies for Anaesthesiologists, along with the World Health Organisation, have strongly advised against scheduling Ketamine because it would effectively prevent the drug's use in many of the world's poorest countries, where it is the only alternative for short term pain relief in surgery.

"While the use of Ketamine as a recreational drug must be addressed, scheduling by the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs would reduce the availability of Ketamine in many countries, increasing suffering and limiting access to treatment for many people world-wide," says Alison Verhoeven, Chief Executive of the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA).

"It is pleasing that Australia is considering a vote against scheduling Ketamine on Friday," says Michael Moore, Chief Executive Officer of the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) and Vice President and President Elect of the World Federation of Public Health Associations. "Illegal use of Ketamine in Australia should be dealt with by enforcing legislation on prescription and supply of drugs."

President of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP), Professor Nick Talley, says Ketamine is an essential medicine in developing countries, particularly in remote areas.

"The continuing availability of Ketamine is crucial for the provision of pain relief, essential surgery and other health care in developing countries," says Professor Talley.

AHHA, PHAA and RACP commend Minister Nash on taking a world view on this issue, through her consideration of a vote against the scheduling of Ketamine. This approach recognises the need for access to pain relief for all who require it, no matter where they live.

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For more information on Ketamine and the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs vote this week, see website links below to the World Medical Association and World Federation of Societies for Anaesthesiologists:

http://www.wma.net/en/40news/20archives/2015/2015_09/index.html

<http://www.wfsahq.org/latest-news/latestnews/298-ketamine-a-call-for-action>