

# GP's long-term prescribing for family leads to reprimand for professional misconduct

Outcome



## Key messages from the case

Treating those with whom you have a close personal relationship can make it very difficult to maintain objectivity and doctors may find themselves being pressured to provide treatment they would not otherwise consider to be in the patient's best interests, as this case illustrates.

## Details of the decision

### Self-prescribing and prescribing for family members

Over a period of five years Dr B wrote prescriptions for her two adult children and husband. One of her children (A) was being treated for a variety of addiction, mental health and other conditions.

Dr B acknowledged she should not have agreed to prescribe for her child but said her life had become 'consumed with trying to achieve the best outcome for [them].'

She also wrote scripts in her husband's name for medications which she consumed.

### Record-keeping

Additionally Dr B failed to maintain records of the treatment and prescriptions.

### Medical certificates

Dr B also completed a medical certificate for social services, representing that she was A's treating practitioner. This was not the case and Dr B acknowledged this would have been an improper treating relationship.

The tribunal considered the doctor's deceptions constituted professional misconduct. It was also noted that clinically, the nature of the treatment was appropriate. However, while expressing sympathy for Dr B's position, the tribunal noted the long duration of the prescribing and the deception towards treating practitioners and social services.

Dr B was reprimanded and ordered to pay legal costs.

Registration conditions were imposed including mentoring and education on professional ethics.

## Key lessons

Avoid treating family members except in an emergency. If you commence a treating relationship, it is difficult to avoid being pressured into providing treatment that would otherwise not be in the patient's best interests.

Do not enter a doctor-patient relationship with a family member or close friend and wherever possible refer family members to another practitioner for ongoing care.

If you do need to provide care for a close friend or family member, for example in an emergency, keep an appropriate record of any care you provide or prescription that you write. Hand over care as soon as possible.

Under Australian law it is an offence to forge a prescription, fraudulently alter a prescription, or present a known forged or altered prescription to obtain a drug.

You also have a professional obligation to ensure that you are honest and not misleading when writing reports and certificates. Only sign a document you believe to be accurate.

## References and further reading

Avant factsheet: [Treating family members, friends or staff](#)

Avant article: ["But it's just a script": prescribing requests from family and friends](#)

Avant factsheet: [Medical records: the essentials](#)

Avant factsheet: [Medical certificates and your responsibilities](#)

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