

Vax surveillance 'needs federal push'

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IMMUNISATION experts are urging the federal government to support a national active surveillance program to monitor adverse events associated with vaccinations.

Addressing delegates at the NCIRS Vaccine Safety Seminar last week in Sydney, WA Health's medical coordinator, Dr Paul Effler, said Australia has the capacity to avoid another Fluvax-like disaster but a national plan using real-time information was needed.

According to Dr Effler, the increase in adverse events in children following influenza vaccination in 2010 that eventually led to the suspension of bioCSL's Fluvax in children under five, pushed the states and individuals to forge ahead with development of active surveillance systems despite lack of federal government support.

One model, SmartVax, developed by WA GP Dr Alan Leeb, is already proving itself.



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SmartVax is a mobile app that uses smartphone and SMS technology to monitor vaccine safety in real time. The automated system extracts immunisation data on routine childhood, influenza and travel vaccines from commonly used practice software.

After a predetermined number of days following vaccination, the system sends a series of SMS messages to patients or parents inquiring whether an adverse event has

been experienced. If so, the recipient is invited to complete a two-minute survey that asks about the nature, severity and duration of the adverse event and whether medical attention was required. The responses are collated and uploaded as a report to the practice software inbox and also automatically sent as de-identified data to health authorities.

Dr Leeb reported an 85% response rate for vaccines given

to children and adults, and a 74% response rates in adults >65 across the eight WA practices already using the system. More than half of patients responded to the SMS within 10 minutes, and within two hours of sending an SMS 80% of all responses had been received and simultaneously sent to WA Health.

Dr Effler said because most GPs use the same practice software, SmartVax has the potential to achieve near universal

coverage by gathering data from the GP setting.

Australia was close to having a world-leading adverse event surveillance system but the government had to be convinced to act.

"If we want robust active surveillance that could help us prevent another Fluvax tragedy,

we need to do this at a national level," he said.



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