



Media release

## United General Practice Australia

23 August 2019

### General Practice leaders condemn Pharmacy Guild's profit-driven raids to undermine quality primary health care

The leaders of Australia's peak general practice organisations have united to condemn attempts by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia to have pharmacists take over roles traditionally and expertly performed by GPs, including moves to have pharmacists prescribe some scheduled medications.

United General Practice Australia (UGPA) reached unanimous agreement at its meeting in Canberra this week to combine resources, including members spread across Australia, to convince governments to resist any attempts by the Pharmacy Guild to undermine and weaken quality primary health care in Australia.

AMA President and Chair of UGPA, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that patient safety should not be put at risk by the Guild's relentless push to increase pharmacy profits.

"The Pharmacy Guild must be stopped in its attempts to bully governments into allowing pharmacists to take over the work of doctors," Dr Bartone said.

"Pharmacists are highly valued members of the health workforce who work well in partnership at the community level with local GPs – but they do not have the skills, expertise, or many years of highly-specialised training to perform the work of GPs.

"Access does not equate to quality care, and these skills are required even when issuing a repeat prescription.

"UGPA's focus is on the provision of safe, quality medical and health care and advice for the community," Dr Bartone said.

"The Guild should focus on advocating for its members and for local community pharmacists, not engaging in petty turf wars to increase profits for its pharmacy owner members.

“This proposal by the Pharmacy Guild flies in the face of the safety standards, even as set out in their own guidelines, in relation to the separation of prescribing and dispensing.”

Dr Adam Coltzau, President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA), said that the Guild is spreading misinformation about poor access to doctors in rural and remote areas.

“The Guild’s dishonest claims that supposed reduced access to doctors in rural and remote areas could be addressed by increasing the scope of pharmacy practice are factually incorrect,” Dr Coltzau said.

“There are very few rural towns that have a pharmacy and no doctor.

“And in smaller rural towns, pharmacies are rarely open after hours, or for any significant time over a weekend.

“Medical practices, even those in rural areas, quarantine appointments for urgent matters each day, and patients are able to take advantage of this service if they need a prescription quickly.

“We understand that running a profitable business in a rural town can be more challenging than in the city, but expanding the pharmacist role into clinical areas in which they aren’t safe to operate is no way to address it. It just puts patients at risk.”

Dr Ewen McPhee, President of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), said that pharmacists working collaboratively with general practitioners was the best and safest model of care.

“Most doctors have a positive and productive relationship with their local pharmacist, and we respect each other’s areas of expertise,” Dr McPhee said.

“Pharmacists can offer a lot when it comes to the management of chronic and complex disease, and in the area of medication safety.

“A collaborative model where each member is working to their appropriate scope of practice, rather than a fragmentation of care, is the way to achieve the best patient outcomes,” Dr McPhee said.

The UGPA leaders pledged to work with Federal and State governments to reject the overtures of the highly paid lobbyists employed by the Pharmacy Guild to put pharmacy profits ahead of patient safety.

UGPA is the broadest representation of general practice leaders in Australia, and comprises representatives from the Australian Medical Association (AMA), Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA), Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), General Practice Supervisors Australia (GPSA), and the General Practice Registrars Australia (GPRA).

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