

Doctors call on State Government to reconsider pharmacy trial

Queensland's peak medical advocacy group has urged the State Government to urgently reconsider a decision to allow pharmacists to dispense medications without a repeat prescription.

AMA Queensland president Dr Dilip Dhupelia is so concerned about the move, he has written to Queensland Health Minister Steven Miles asking him to reconsider the trial and instead wait for national regulations to be decided by COAG.

New South Wales Health Minister Brad Hazzard has dismissed calls for a similar trial in that state.ⁱ

In April, Mr Miles announced the trial allowing Queensland pharmacists to provide the contraceptive pill and antibiotics for urinary tract infections without a current prescription. The trial was recommended by a Parliamentary Committee into expanding the scope of services of pharmacists.

Dr Dhupelia said GPs had genuine concerns about patient safety and were worried that allowing pharmacists to dispense medications could lead to further overuse of antibiotics, rendering them ineffective.

"The Queensland Health Minister's decision has gazumped the national considerations now underway by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPCC)," Dr Dhupelia said.

"AMA Queensland believes there should be national uniformity in such decisions and Queensland shouldn't be going it alone.

"When the New South Wales Health Minister dismissed calls for a similar trial, he agreed it should be dealt with at a national level so as not to lead to different prescribing practices in different states."

Dr Dhupelia said the Health Minister's decision to allow a trial also went against the recommendation of the Therapeutic Goods Administrations Independent Advisory Committee on Scheduling, which warned in 2015 against pharmacists dispensing of oral contraceptives.ⁱⁱ

He said people may think providing contraceptives and antibiotics could do little harm but only a fully qualified doctor could determine what medication was suitable for a patient after reviewing their full medical history.

"Who is going to train these pharmacists? Who is going to decide what they need to know to allow them to safely dispense Schedule 4 medications?" he said.

Dr Dhupelia was disappointed about the lack of consultation with AMA Queensland before approving the trial to go ahead.

“The Minister had indicated he would work with AMA Queensland on these issues but we learned that the trial was going ahead through the media,” he said.

“GPs are rightly concerned that, once we open the floodgates, the pressure will be on to allow pharmacists to dispense an expanded list of medications, then where does it stop?

“This would only lead to further fragmentation of care and put at risk the health and well-being of patients.

“This is a blatant push by the pharmacy sector and the State Government has condoned the move. We mustn’t put convenience ahead of our health.”

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ⁱ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/nsw-health-minister-rejects-pharmacy-trial-for-antibiotics-and-contraceptive-pill-20190429-p51i8t.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.tga.gov.au/book/part-final-decisions-matters-referred-expert-advisory-committee-3#contraceptive-pill>