

Doctors warn patients will be the losers in new pharmacy trial

Doctors have slammed the State Government's decision to allow pharmacists to dispense the contraceptive pill as well as antibiotics for urinary tract infections without a current prescription.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland President Dr Dilip Dhupelia said it was irresponsible and reckless to allow medications to be provided without doctors' advice.

"Pharmacists do not have the medical training required to determine the various factors involved in ensuring patient safety when it comes to medication.

"This is a blatant push by the pharmacy sector and the State Government has condoned the move. Patients are set to be the biggest losers in this transaction."

Dr Dhupelia's comments follow the announcement yesterday by Health Minister Steven Miles that Queensland Health would launch a state-wide trial allowing pharmacists to provide the pill and antibiotics without a prescription.

"The reason doctors require a consultation to provide repeat scripts is because they are qualified to ask the relevant questions and take account of what things may have changed since the medication was first prescribed," Dr Dhupelia said.

"How will a pharmacist determine that the oral contraceptive pill continues to be the most appropriate contraceptive for a specific woman?"

"Will a patient's usual GP even be informed that medication has been dispensed to them without their doctor's input?"

Dr Dhupelia said setting up a committee to evaluate the trial would just be a waste of more health dollars which could be better used delivering health services.

"I don't understand why the State Government is wasting money on such bureaucratic processes, when we already have highly skilled GPs who can do this work."

The trial was a recommendation from a Parliamentary Committee into expanding the scope of services of pharmacists.

The committee recommended pharmacists rely on the Government's 13 HEALTH hotline and the My Health Record database for medical advice when unsure about dispensing medications that normally require a doctor's prescription.

Dr Dhupelia said this was reckless and dangerous.

"The Government's 13 HEALTH phone service is a nurse-led hotline with one GP assigned for all of Queensland," he said. "The Queensland Government's own website concedes that 13 HEALTH 'is not a diagnostic service and should not replace medical consultation'.

“And when it comes to relying on patient’s information from My Health Record, that fact that nearly one million Australians have opted out of this database makes it a highly unreliable source of information.”

Dr Dhupelia said the Queensland Government’s move to roll out the trial would require legislative changes and placed the state at odds with the rest of the country that abided by a national governance framework for prescribing standards and training.

He said Queensland doctors had called for a new system where pharmacists worked collaboratively with GPs within GP practices to improve convenience for patients.

“The public health system would save \$545 million over four years by having pharmacists working within GP practices but that saving has been ignored,” he said.

“The Health Minister is duty bound to protect patients, not bow to the pharmacy lobby’s greed and make it easier for people to buy drugs without a prescription or seeing a doctor.”

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