

10/07/2018

RE: Inquiry into the establishment of a pharmacy council and transfer of pharmacy ownership in Queensland

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you to express my concerns regarding some elements of this inquiry, in particular Issue for Consideration # 4 (that the Act be amended to allow any party to own a pharmacy). Such a change would result in profits being put before the health and safety of the community, free convenient walk-in access to health care professionals (pharmacists) being removed, conflicts of interest for medication manufacturers/wholesalers who could own pharmacies, the large number of free health care services currently offered by pharmacies all around Queensland slashed and the closure of many small businesses in this state.

As a pharmacist who owns a community pharmacy, I am first and foremost bound by my professional obligations to ensure the safe and efficacious use of medications by all individuals within the community. This is my highest priority and upholding these obligations often comes at a cost to the business. Some examples of this include declining the sale of medications where a patient's safety may be at risk, enforcing staged supply of medications where overuse or abuse is suspected, and ensuring appropriate pharmacist to prescription ratios to guarantee pharmacists have time to counsel patients on the safe use of medications. If non-pharmacists were allowed to own pharmacies they would not be bound by these obligations and instead their only priority would lie with profits for the company.

Another issue for consideration in the interests of public safety is the access to prescription medications (including controlled drugs). Under the current system, pharmacists own pharmacies and are therefore responsible for all access to the dispensary and medications (for example keys, alarm codes, safe combinations). Changing the rules regarding who can own a pharmacy would therefore affect who has access to these medications and increase opportunities for non-pharmacists to access medications. This has the potential to increase illegal supply and distribution of medications within the community – an obvious risk to public safety.

A final point I would like to make is the number of services offered in community pharmacies which are either offered for free or which run at a loss for the pharmacy. Examples of such services just within my pharmacy are home deliveries to elderly and disabled patients, returning unwanted medications and organising destruction of potentially dangerous medications, supply of diabetes equipment and blood pressure/blood glucose monitoring. I'm sure there are plenty more examples from pharmacies around the state. An owner whose only priority was to profits, rather than one with a passionate interest in the health of the community, would be sure to remove these services.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express my views on this critically important issue. I hope I have given you some appreciation of the efforts pharmacy owners go to help maintain the safe use of medications and the health of the community in Queensland.

Kind regards

Matt Leader
Partner – Tufnell Road Pharmacy