



# Queensland Parliament Inquiry into the establishment of a Pharmacy Council and transfer of pharmacy ownership in Queensland

Submission by The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy

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## Specific issues for consideration in this submission

18. Should the scope of practice of pharmacists and pharmacy assistants in Queensland be extended? If so, in what areas of practice?
19. What additional training for pharmacists/pharmacy assistants, or other risk reduction measures, should be implemented to ensure patient safety?

## Submission

### Position Statement

The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy contends.

- The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy is an Accredited Program provider (1), and is thus able to deliver a registrable pharmacy program which meets all current requirements.
- The undergraduate curriculum well prepares pharmacists for current and emerging scopes of pharmacy practice. At registration, pharmacists have the ability to contribute to improved consumer outcomes by improving therapeutic medication management.
- It is important that regulatory structures surrounding pharmacists are sufficiently agile to be able to respond to the changing health needs of the community.
- Extending recognised professional activities of pharmacists will in some cases require further education and training. It is important to avoid the addition of fragmented training programs for each additional activity. The university sector is best placed to embed new activities within the existing knowledge and skills of new graduates and work closely with professional and regulatory bodies to support necessary educational and training needs for pharmacists to meet all the current and future needs of the Queensland community.

This submission represents the opinions of the contributing authors listed in this document. It does not necessarily represent an official position of The University of Queensland.

# Background

## Pharmacy Education in Australia and The University of Queensland, School of Pharmacy

Pharmacists are highly trained Health Care professionals with a strong foundational knowledge in the basic sciences, and specialist knowledge in human health and the safe and effective use of medicines. Pharmacy education in Australia currently involves the successful completion of at least five years of formal training and internship before being able to register to practice as a pharmacist. To maintain registration a pharmacist must undertake ongoing continuing professional development activities.

The School of Pharmacy at The University of Queensland is the largest Pharmacy School in Queensland, currently graduating approximately 220 pharmacy students per year. The School offers a well-established four year Bachelor of Pharmacy degree (Honours) program that meets Australian Quality Framework (AQF), level 8, criteria. The program was recently reaccredited with the Australian Pharmacy Council for six years (2017-2023).

The University of Queensland Bachelor of Pharmacy (Honours) degree is structured around six themes, comprising Quality Use of Medicines, Dosage Form Design, Drug Discovery, Data Analysis in Pharmacy, Biological Fate of Drugs and Social, and Professional Aspects of Pharmacy. These themes are vertically and horizontally integrated and are regularly reviewed. Introductory courses in chemistry, biology and biomedical sciences prepare students for later professional specialities. The Australian Pharmacy Council sets the learning outcomes for the curriculum, which are used to construct a framework for the learning activities and assessment, and these are mapped to the competency elements set out in the National Competency Standards.

Within The University of Queensland Bachelor of Pharmacy (Honours) degree, students are required to complete over 380 hours of supervised placements. Placements are included in every year of the program and take place across rural and community pharmacies, and Queensland Health facilities. On completion of the degree graduates are eligible for provisional registration with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), and on subsequent completion of an internship year, in either community or hospital pharmacies, they are eligible for registration as a pharmacist in Australia. The School also offers an Intern Training Program (ITP) and a suite of postgraduate coursework programs for registered pharmacists.

It should be noted that pharmacy education in Australia is incredibly strong, with three schools in the country ranked in the top 25 in the world. The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy has risen in the last four years in the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World Ranking of Universities for "Pharmacy and Pharmacology" from 51-100 to 39 to 31 to 25. If Universities that do not have Pharmacy Schools are excluded, then The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy is ranked number 14 in the world. In the most recent University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) World rankings, The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy was ranked 18 which places it 2<sup>nd</sup> in Australia (behind Monash University) and above The University of Sydney. Thus, Queensland has one of the highest ranking Schools of Pharmacy in the world and the ranking of this School is rising. This underpins the capability of the School to meet the coming changes and requirements of the pharmacy profession and the people of Queensland (see details and links at the end of this document).

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## Role of medicines and pharmacists in the health care system

Timely access to medicines, a core pillar of Australia's National Medicines Policy, is realized through Australia's network of over 5,300 community pharmacies, which are well-disseminated throughout urban, rural and remote regions. This far-reaching network provides Australians with convenient, reliable and high quality access to the medicines they need, regardless of where they reside. Indeed community pharmacists are the most frequently accessed of all healthcare providers (2). The broad distribution of pharmacies is particularly advantageous in the geographically enormous state of Queensland.

It should be noted, that the practice of pharmacy goes beyond the dispensing of medicines. It also involves the provision of information and services that encourage the quality use of therapies. Pharmacists are medicines experts, providing professional advice and counselling on medications, including their use and effects, as well as general health care. Although the focus of pharmacist actions are around the efficacy of medicines (how well they work) it is less appreciated that there is an equally important role in medication safety. Pharmacists develop strong relationships with their clients, sometimes over generations, as many people enjoy the benefits of frequenting a single pharmacy. The stronger the pharmacist-patient connection, the better the health care outcomes that can be achieved.

The environment in which a pharmacist practices is highly regulated in terms of patient safety. To practise pharmacy an individual must be registered with the Pharmacy Board of Australia and must satisfy certain legislative criteria, including, for example, having certain educational qualifications as well as practical experience and competencies. The Pharmacy Board of Australia's primary mandate is to protect the public. Pharmacists are accountable for the advice and services provided in their pharmacies. Their approval to dispense medication under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and continuing registration depends on them being physically present in the pharmacy and abiding by the rules, codes and guidelines of the Pharmacy Board of Australia.

When considering one currently topical specific area – medication prescribing – it needs to be appreciated that pharmacists currently diagnose "minor" ailments and then essentially prescribe and dispense Schedule 3 (Pharmacy only) medicines. Schedule 4 medicines (which belong to the prescription-only category) are currently prescribed by medical practitioners. There are moves to create and extend the range of medicines that can be provided by multiple health professionals. Clearly, such scheduling could allow for pharmacists to prescribe these medicines. The profession, on behalf of the community, can also discuss and determine a range of other stages that fit under prescribing such as the ongoing provision of medicines prescribed by a medical practitioner for chronic diseases.

## Item 18: Should the scope of practice of pharmacists and pharmacy assistants in Queensland be extended? If so, in what areas of practice?

### Scope of practice

The pharmacy profession is as much about healthcare and advice as it is about the supply of pharmaceuticals. It has been estimated that 3.9 million Australians seek health-related advice from their pharmacist each year (3).

In addition to their role in distributing scheduled medicines, pharmacies also provide multiple additional services, which can vary from pharmacy to pharmacy and in response to local requirements, and to bridge gaps in the health care system (2). These services include: Asthma management support; quality use of medicines support for residential aged care facilities; blood pressure monitoring; community health education/promotion; bone density testing; compounding services (extemporaneous dispensing); diabetes risk assessment and self-management support (including Diabetes MedsCheck); chronic obstructive pulmonary disease risk-assessment and self-management support; needle and syringe programs; mother and infant services; home delivery services; mental health support; minor ailments support; chemotherapy preparation; complementary health therapies; cholesterol testing; home medicines reviews; continence support; immunisation services; dose administration aids (i.e. blister packs); health aids and equipment; medication reconciliation post-discharge from hospital; opioid dependence treatment services; MedsCheck and Diabetes MedsCheck; product recalls and safety alert information and co-ordination; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander quality use of medicines support (2).

The scope of practice of pharmacy should relate to the needs of the community. The UQ School of Pharmacy contends that for the last 10 years we have been producing pharmacy graduates who, after completing their intern training program, are capable of undertaking an even broader scope of practice than is currently available to them.

From an education and training perspective, it is not desirable to consider a fixed “shopping list” of specific activities because these can change from time to time. It is preferable to provide a description of the quality and extent of education and training that we are providing to students and can provide in the future. As a high quality, flexible and responsive education provider we can provide a very high level of education and training, and the community and the pharmacy profession can specify the areas which meet the evolving needs of the people of Queensland from time to time.

Extending the scope of practice for pharmacists – subject to adequate education and training – could: improve timeliness of care delivery to patients and access to this care (by releasing more highly skilled clinicians to undertake more complex tasks), resulting in fewer costs from delays and possibly greater client satisfaction; provide a more flexible and responsive workforce while preserving (or even improving) the safety and quality of care; increase work satisfaction for (and retention of) health care workers; decrease costs of service delivery; and lead to greater ability to respond to changes in demand for health services (4).

## Item 19: What additional training for pharmacists/pharmacy assistants, or other risk reduction measures, should be implemented to ensure patient safety?

### Pharmacists

Pharmacy student training at accredited pharmacy schools in Australia well prepares pharmacist for current and emerging scopes of pharmacy practice.

Risk reduction understanding and application during the pharmacy degree and internship year is achieved through extensive student mentorship. It should be noted that all graduate pharmacy students are required to complete a period of approved supervised practice in accordance with the requirements set out in the Pharmacy Board of Australia's Pharmacy Supervised Practice Arrangements Registration Standard to be eligible to apply for general registration. The period of supervised practice is 1,824 hours in the case of graduates of Australian or New Zealand pharmacy courses approved by the Pharmacy Board of Australia. The supervised practice includes satisfactory completion of an Intern Training Program, unless the Board has given an exemption to this requirement.

If a pharmacists' current training does not prepare them for an extension in their scope of practice, pharmacists also have many opportunities to learn new skills through continuing education sessions, and through further training from a pharmacy school (for example via a post-graduate certificate or diploma).

The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy exists within the Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences (HaBS) which is comprised of 6 schools covering 9 health professional areas (of which 8/9 are world class in their research programs), being Pharmacy, Psychology, Human Movement and Nutritional Science, Rehabilitation Sciences, Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work and Dentistry. The University of Queensland also has a Faculty of Medicine. The School of Pharmacy thus has access to enormous resources to supplement the training and education of pharmacy students to meet any future educational needs.

An important issue is that there are presently some legislative barriers that prevent The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy from undertaking some areas of pharmacy student skill development. For example, current legislation restricts comprehensive training of students in the area of vaccinations.

### Pharmacy Assistants

The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy strongly supports a higher level of education and training for pharmacist's assistants, but this is not a natural role for a tertiary education provider like The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy.

There may be a role for The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy in the education or further education in a "train the trainer" model of education of pharmacists.

## Summary

The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy contends:

- The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy is an Accredited Program provider (1), and is thus able to deliver a registrable pharmacy program which meets all current requirements.
- The undergraduate curriculum well prepares pharmacists for current and emerging scopes of pharmacy practice. At registration, pharmacists have the ability to contribute to improved consumer outcomes by improving therapeutic medication management.
- It is important that regulatory structures surrounding pharmacists are sufficiently agile to be able to respond to the changing health needs of the community.
- Extending recognised professional activities of pharmacists will in some cases require further education and training. It is important to avoid the addition of fragmented training programs for each additional activity. The university sector is best placed to embed new activities within the existing knowledge and skills of new graduates and work closely with professional and regulatory bodies to support necessary educational and training needs for pharmacists to meet all the current and future needs of the Queensland community.

The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy contends that it can educate pharmacy students to whatever level is required by the community for the foreseeable future. The community and pharmacy profession can decide what specific areas are desirable, and The University of Queensland School of Pharmacy can suitably educate and train the coming workforce.



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