



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

**Submission to the Health, Communities, Disability Services
and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee**

**Helen Whitehead
Chief Executive Officer
Epilepsy Queensland Inc
hwhitehead@epilepsyqueensland.com.au
PO Box 1457, Coorparoo DC, Q 4151**

Position

Epilepsy Queensland supports the establishment of a Pharmacy Council in Queensland.

Epilepsy Queensland supports the current model of pharmacy ownership and is of the view that it's serving the Queensland community well.

Pharmacy Council

We understand that Queensland is the only state or territory that does not have an independent pharmacy authority. We believe that establishment of a pharmacy authority separate to a Queensland Government department, with appropriate consumer, specialist business and professional representation, including pharmacists, would bring Queensland into line with other jurisdictions. Such an authority would strengthen best practice and facilitate processes surrounding licensing and registration of premises.

Current model of pharmacy ownership – How the present model works well for people with epilepsy

Epilepsy Queensland has worked closely with the network of community pharmacies for over twenty years.

There is no health condition where the relationship between patient and pharmacist is more important. People with epilepsy depend on anti-epileptic medication to control seizures. Their life depends on it. Not taking medication is the greatest cause of breakthrough seizures and hospitalization. It adds to the health system burden and can be a contributing factor in Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy.

For our members, medication is usually taken at certain times during the day. The community pharmacist often provides dose administration aids and advice to people living with epilepsy, to ensure correct and timely consumption of the antiepileptic drug. This vital assistance is often provided free-of-charge (or for a nominal fee) by the pharmacist.

People with epilepsy visit their local pharmacist far more frequently than the general population. The community pharmacist is a vital link in their health services and to optimal seizure management and well-being.

Pharmacists are instrumental in helping our members every day. While dispensing of medication is important, the community pharmacist's role in epilepsy health care is so much more.

Our members value a trusted relationship with their community pharmacist. As everyone's epilepsy and treatment is different, there is a need for an individualized plan on how to manage epilepsy, and the community pharmacist plays an important role in developing individualized strategies for medication management as part of the bigger epilepsy management plan.

Innovative and flexible methods of engagement with customers is appreciated, especially by those who have mobility and transport challenges. Community pharmacies will go above and beyond what would be expected from a pharmacy with more of a retail/commercial focus. We hear stories from our members about how their local community pharmacy has gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure they have access to their epilepsy medication. This might include securing supply when the particular medication is difficult to get (medication cannot be substituted – even swapping a brand name drug with the generic version can be disastrous in epilepsy), and/or personally delivering it to the patient's home.

Community pharmacies are seen as "safe environments" for people with epilepsy. For example, we have heard of instances where a person with epilepsy is aware that a seizure is coming on and if he/she is in close enough proximity, it is not uncommon for them to go into a pharmacy where they know there are trained people who would respond appropriately.

Around 100,000 Queenslanders will acquire epilepsy during their lifetime. Nearly all will require anti-epileptic drugs, whether they are living in the city or in rural and regional areas. The network of community pharmacies in regional Queensland shines bright in the maintenance of well-being for people with epilepsy. When other health services are thin on the ground, the community pharmacy is accessible and an important source of information and advice. One of our members who frequently visited regional Queensland described how her first point of call when going to a new town was always the community pharmacy to introduce herself and speak with the pharmacist about epilepsy. The pharmacy being the first point of contact for people with epilepsy is common, with pharmacists providing advice, referral and support services, often at no cost and with no appointment required.

All of these benefits of community pharmacy are dependent on the establishment of a relationship with a trusted health provider, the pharmacist. Community pharmacies by their nature, facilitate the relationship between patient and health provider. It is of great concern that our members may not benefit similarly from the focus of big, impersonal, and commercial pharmacies.

Deregulation of pharmacies is also likely to result in closure of pharmacies especially in rural and remote areas that will drastically diminish patient access to health care.

We strongly support the current model of pharmacy ownership, where pharmacists own pharmacies, and the focus is on health care, not business size and profits.

Current model of pharmacy ownership – How the present model works well for Epilepsy Queensland Inc

In addition to the all important direct benefits for people with epilepsy, the current model of pharmacy ownership is significantly beneficial to our organisation and the realization of our goals.

Community pharmacies are an integral part of our patient education, community awareness and fundraising strategies.

Community pharmacies share our information resources with people with epilepsy to empower them and optimise health outcomes. They refer people to Epilepsy Queensland for information and support.

Staff from community pharmacies are committed to providing the best service possible and have attended training/professional development offered by Epilepsy Queensland.

Community pharmacists have been speakers at our education events for local communities.

Community pharmacies are vital to the success of our community awareness campaigns, for example displaying information materials and posters. Big commercial business has not been a supporter of our “grass roots” awareness campaigns.

A significant amount of revenue is generated through community pharmacies selling merchandise for our Purple Day and Little Poss Appeal campaigns. Big commercial business has not been similarly supportive. We fear that deregulation may mean a loss of revenue for us.

In summary, community pharmacy is a key partner in many important aspects of Epilepsy Queensland’s work.

Scope of practice

Epilepsy Queensland supports widening the scope of practice for community pharmacies.

In particular, it would be beneficial for people with epilepsy to be able to access:

- Medication on an “emergency supply”
- Medication via a prescription renewal service (for medications that were initiated by their neurologist and the GP has been writing repeat prescriptions).

Conclusion

Epilepsy Queensland supports the introduction of a Pharmacy Council and increasing the scope of practice of community pharmacies.

Epilepsy Queensland does not support deregulation of the pharmacy industry in Queensland. The current system of community pharmacy is optimal for the health of Queenslanders and is of great benefit for people with epilepsy and Epilepsy Queensland.