

Patient lives at risk under pharmacist health plan

Lives will be at risk under new laws allowing Queensland pharmacists to rely on nurses for medical advice so they can sell medication without a prescription.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland President Dr Dilip Dhupelia has warned that the 13 HEALTH hotline would not be a strong enough safeguard for patients receiving treatment from a pharmacist.

“13 HEALTH is largely staffed by registered nurses with only one senior medical officer, currently a GP, responsible for all 16 separate contact centres across Queensland,” Dr Dhupelia said.

“Even the State Government’s own website concedes that 13 HEALTH is not a diagnostic service and should not replace medical consultation.”

Dr Dhupelia said suggesting that pharmacists could also rely on patient records through the new My Health Record was also fundamentally flawed.

“More than one million people have already opted out of My Health Record, so it’s hardly reliable,” he said.

“And for those patients who opt-in to stay in it and feel confident to reveal their confidential medical history to Pharmacists, the database for My Health Record will take up many more years to develop and mature with up-to-date information that can be safely relied on.”

A State parliamentary committee, headed by Thuringowa MP Aaron Harper, proposed earlier this year that pharmacists be able to prescribe or dispense medications in low risk situations without a doctor’s prescription.

This was despite warnings from medical groups that allowing pharmacists to take on a pseudo doctor role meant that some patients could find their health unintentionally at risk.

“Relegating the health of Queenslanders to pharmacists and a telephone hotline is inadequate and offensive to the thousands of taxpayers who fund Medicare and expect better healthcare in return,” Dr Dhupelia said.

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