

22 October 2020

Doctors call for better protection from medication-seeking patients

GPs fear they will bear the brunt of opioid dependent patients seeking prescriptions when Queensland Health's Real-Time Reporting (RTR) digital system is launched next year.

The new system, to be called QScript, is expected to be operational by mid-2021 and has been designed to curb opioid misuse by stopping the current practice of doctor shopping that allows patients to visit multiple GPs for prescriptions.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland Councillor and GP Dr Nick Yim said, under the new system, doctors would have to stare down opioid dependent patients or face fines of more than \$2300.

"It can be very scary to be alone in a room with a patient who is under the influence on opioids or going through withdrawal and is seeking some more," Dr Yim said.

"Many GPs as well as their staff have been verbally and physically assaulted in the course of simply doing their jobs.

"Whilst we strongly support the implementation of QScript to reduce opioid misuse, we are calling on the next State Government to provide GPs with protection under the law in the same way the Palaszczuk Government is considering it for paramedics, police and other emergency workers."

The Palaszczuk Government is currently reviewing a report from the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council (QSAC) on toughening up penalties for people who assault emergency workers and public officers in the course of their work. The QSAC report also recommended broadening the definition of relevant workers to include teachers, bus drivers and others.

Dr Yim said GPs needed to be included.

"All doctors and their staff have the right to feel safe when they come to work and imposing penalties that reflect the seriousness of the crime is one way to help protect them," he said.

"In addition, government needs to invest more in drug recovery support services and programs. When QScript flags a patient, GPs need to be able to offer timely treatment options."

Under the proposed QScript system, Queensland Health's prescription information system would be integrated with the Commonwealth Department of Health's National Data Exchange, allowing the sharing of real time information amongst doctors about patients' prescription habits.

Dr Yim said GPs would have to log in to QScript before prescribing a monitored medicine, such as benzodiazepine.

“The system will give doctors a green, amber or red alert to help them determine whether they can prescribe the drug but it’s then up to the GP to have that conversation with the patient,” he said.

“Failure to log in to the system will result in the GP losing 20 penalty points or facing a \$2360 fine.”

AMA Queensland is also calling on the next State Government to commit to involving clinicians in the roll out of all new e-health technologies, including QScript.

In its election manifesto, *11-Point Action Plan - The Pathway to Better Health for Queenslanders*, AMA Queensland calls for \$313m from the next government to roll out a range of digital health technologies that would improve the delivery of healthcare.

AMA Queensland Vice President Dr Bav Manoharan said digital health had enormous potential to improve access and equity of care.

“The problems we have faced in the past with digital health solutions like the integrated electronic medical record (ieMR) is that bureaucrats and information technology experts have determined where and how it gets rolled out and what it needs to offer,” Dr Manoharan said.

“The key to success of rolling out new digital technologies across Queensland hospitals is to involve the doctors and clinicians who use the system every day.

“Through clinical involvement, glitches can be identified and resolved faster and staff can become more efficient more quickly at using the new system.”

AMA Queensland’s *11-Point Action Plan – The Pathway to Better Health for Queenslanders* also calls for:

- \$7.57m to boost maternity services in rural and regional communities
- \$3m to reduce community-based alcohol-related harm and violence
- \$4.2m to improve the health of First Nations Queenslanders with a safe and culturally safe appropriate hospital network
- \$ 2.5m to include doctors in healthcare decisions
- \$1.67m to improve doctors’ mental health and workplace wellbeing

Read the full 11-Point Action Plan: The future health agenda [HERE](#)

MEDIA CONTACTS: Fran Metcalf, Sequel PR – 0417 627 867; Chiara Lesevre, AMA Queensland – 0419 735 641.

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Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland Councillor and GP Dr Maria Boulton said, under the new system, doctors would have to stare down opioid dependent patients or face fines of more than \$2300.

"It can be very scary to be alone in a room with a patient who is under the influence of opioids or going through withdrawal and is seeking some more," Dr Boulton said.

"Many GPs as well as their staff have been verbally and physically assaulted in the course of simply doing their jobs.

"Whilst we strongly support the implementation of QScript to reduce opioid misuse, we are calling on the next State Government to provide GPs with protection under the law in the same way the Palaszczuk Government is considering it for other frontline workers."

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"All doctors and their staff have the right to feel safe when they come to work and imposing penalties that reflect the seriousness of the crime is one way to help protect them," she said.

"In addition, government needs to invest more in drug recovery and pain management services and programs. When QScript flags a patient, GPs need to be able to offer timely treatment options."

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