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New survey reveals doctors ignored and patients at risk

Queensland doctors say their advice is being ignored in the public health system and patients are being placed at risk, a new Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland survey has revealed.

AMA Queensland President Dr Chris Perry said the State Government's push to trial COVID testing in retail pharmacies - despite repeated opposition from doctors and pharmacists - was a prime example of this trend.

"Doctors have advised the government of the risks of testing people for COVID in retail outlets, and the working pharmacists themselves are overwhelmingly opposed to the trial on safety grounds and yet it is going ahead," Dr Perry said.

"The trial is backed by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia – a lobby group that represents a small number of wealthy pharmacy owners who benefit from increased traffic to their retail outlets – but it has been vehemently opposed by working pharmacists and the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia which has called for an immediate stop to the trial.

"It shows the State Government is totally out of touch with community expectations about its role to protect people's health and is blatantly ignoring sound medical advice."

Australian Medical Association Federal President Dr Omar Khorshid has supported Dr Perry's concerns, writing to Queensland Health Minister Steven Miles to warn him that COVID testing in pharmacies "is dangerous and poses unacceptable risks" to staff, customers and the wider community.

Dr Perry called on the State Government to invest more in existing COVID testing centres, rather than contracting out the important health measure to commercial enterprise.

"Fully equipped testing locations already exist with trained staff," he said. "We need to boost the number of these services and ensure there's adequate supply of PPE such as head coverings, face shields, masks and gowns rather than encourage sick people to wander through shopping centres and retail outlets."

AMA Queensland polled 700 doctors across the state in the past month to get their views about patient care delivery in the public health system in the lead up to the state election in October.

AMA Queensland Vice President Dr Bav Manoharan said only three per cent of doctors surveyed believed the State Government is making sound medical decisions regarding patient care.

"Sixty per cent responded that Queensland Health ignored their advice in favour of cheaper solutions to patient care, while a further 38 per cent said they believed the State Government made some sound decisions, 'though there are some policies that don't make medical sense'," Dr Manoharan said.

"The survey revealed widespread concern about the expanded scope of practice of pharmacists with the COVID testing trial just one example of this increasing trend.

“More than 90 per cent of doctors surveyed said the State Government trial allowing pharmacists to diagnose people with urinary tract infections (UTIs) and prescribe antibiotics placed patients at a medium to extremely high risk.

“Many also noted the trial contradicts national and global efforts to reduce antimicrobial resistance.

“Pharmacists handing out antibiotics for possible urinary symptoms which could be caused by pelvic cancers or bladder stones, fragment patient care and lead to poor health outcomes for Queenslanders.”

On the whole, the survey found 38 per cent of doctors had little or no faith in the public health system while 45 per cent said they had some faith, but had noticed a decline in quality and services over the past decade.

Dr Manoharan said many doctors feared a rise in misdiagnoses and medical accidents if the current public health system was allowed to continue.

“Doctors believe appointing people with frontline health experience to key policy-making roles in the public system is the top solution to improving patient care, followed by increased funding for primary and preventative care,” he said.

Dr Manoharan said AMA Queensland believed it was important to gauge the views of doctors on the state of health before people went to the polls on October 31.

“This survey sends a clear message to all political parties contesting the next State election about what Queensland patients need and deserve,” he said.

“AMA Queensland is calling on all political parties to lay out their visions for health care for Queensland, so voters can make an informed decision at the ballot box.

“AMA Queensland believes every Queenslander deserves equal access to quality health care.”

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