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Leading NSW pharmacist calls for end to Queensland drug trial

A leading New South Wales pharmacist has called for a controversial trial underway in Queensland to be stopped, fearing it will increase resistance to antibiotics in the community

Queensland is the only state or territory in Australia to allow the trial, which enables pharmacists to diagnose urinary tract infections (UTIs) and prescribe antibiotics without testing patients.

Senior Infectious Diseases Pharmacist, Aryan Shahabi-Sirjani, of the NSW Antimicrobial Stewardship Pharmacist Network (NASPN), said proposals for a similar trial in the UK had been withdrawn because of concerns about increasing resistance to antibiotics.

Mr Shahabi-Sirjani said a similar trial in New Zealand led to the country having the region's highest use of the antibiotic trimethoprim, with a corresponding increase in rates of resistance to the drug by the common bacteria that cause UTIs.

The NASPN, a group of 64 specialist and senior specialist antimicrobial stewardship and infectious disease pharmacists, made a submission to the Therapeutic Goods Administration last year opposing the down-scheduling of trimethoprim and enabling pharmacists to prescribe the antibiotic.

"Pharmacists in Australia are not currently qualified to diagnose UTIs (which requires) utilising the appropriate history, physical examination and investigations of the patient," the group submitted to the TGA.

"There is an inherent risk of pharmacists missing a differential diagnosis or complications of a UTI. The most important complication that bears significant mortality is sepsis."

In the submission, Mr Shahabi-Sirjani wrote patient care needed to be delivered in a holistic manner, using all available diagnostic tools and skills, rather than in a fragmented fashion enabled by the pharmacy trial.

AMA Queensland President Dr Chris Perry said doctors had grave concerns about the risk of misdiagnosis of symptoms and the threat of patients' conditions worsening.

"This is a really dangerous initiative and one that doctors have vehemently opposed," Dr Perry said. "Unfortunately, our concerns have fallen on deaf ears."

Dr Perry said pharmacists did a three-hour online training module and a 20-question multiple choice exam to be eligible to take part in the trial.,

"It takes unnecessary and unwanted risks with patients' health," he said.

"AMA Queensland calls on the State Government to put an end to the trial and work with doctors and pharmacists on ways to deliver collaborative, efficient and safe patient care."

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