

8 May 2020

Queensland Government aids pharmacies in placing profits over patients

The State Government is feeding an industry-wide drive by pharmacists to cash in on patients at the expense of health care, doctors have warned.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland Councillor Dr Marco Giuseppin said an [article in the latest edition of *Australian Journal of Pharmacy*](#)¹ revealed the pharmacy industry's money-making agenda at the expense of patient health care by urging pharmacists to adopt 'ten top ways to accelerate profits'.

"This reveals the real intention behind the pharmacy industry's lobbying of the State Government to allow it to provide extra services such as vaccinations and prescribing medications without a doctor's prescription," Dr Giuseppin said.

"Instead of protecting patient care over profits, the State Government is dishing up discounted health care to Queenslanders at pharmacies in an irresponsible cost-cutting exercise.

"AMA Queensland has repeatedly voiced concerns about a conflict of interest in allowing commercial businesses to provide medical treatments, as well as the risk of pharmacists diagnosing medical conditions.

"It's akin to playing Russian roulette with people's health."

The *AJP* report, written by pharmacy industry consultant Bruce Annabel and New Zealand-based retailer Mal Scrymgeour, warned pharmacies of a 2.2% fall in patient visit numbers and a 6.6% drop in sundries sales last year.

They called for innovate ways to boost their bottom lines, including offering opioid replacement services because they were 'an excellent profitable service for pharmacists' and writing leave certificates for employees.

"Innovator pharmacies charge \$34.95 (for a leave certificate), some a little more," the authors wrote.

The article made a special reference to the Queensland Government because it had 'recently added a large flotilla of new pharmacy immunisations' with each flu shot delivering a \$15 net profit to the pharmacist.

"Health Minister Steven Miles has recently made changes that allows Queensland pharmacies to offer nine different types of immunisations, compared with three or four in every other state or territory," Dr Giuseppin.

"Queensland is also the only state or territory to approve a trial allowing pharmacists to diagnose patients and prescribe antibiotics as well as some other medications.

"It's unnecessary and irresponsible public health care."

The *AJP* article suggested pharmacies provide health solutions for minor ailments because ‘the average sale and profitability is high’ with patients often needing ‘more than one item’, attracting a higher profit margin.

It also urged pharmacists to target the vulnerable and elderly through Dose Administration Aids (DAAs), a government-funded program to improve patient medication compliance, particularly common amongst aged care patients.

“The improved compliance makes the community DAA patient the most profitable in pharmacy,” they wrote. “Some pharmacists think this service is unprofitable. Nothing could be further from the truth and patient visits increase because they have a very important reason to return.”

Pharmacists were also urged to start offering a range of ‘innovative’ health management programs for patients suffering everything from diabetes and sleep disorders to mental health and chronic pain because they ‘generate a lot of patient visits and, as critical mass builds, generates significant income’.

Dr Giuseppin said offering these sorts of programs in pharmacies fragmented patient care and led to poor health outcomes for people.

“The State Government needs to prioritise patient care rather than allow pharmacies to use patients as cash cows,” he said.

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

ⁱ <https://ajp.com.au/columns/business-class/profit-accelerators/>