

19 June 2019

Queensland MP
Parliament House Brisbane
via email:

Dear Queensland Member of Parliament,

RE: The Queensland Health Minister's decision to support a trial allowing pharmacists to dispense antibiotics for urinary tract infections (UTIs) and the contraceptive pill without a prescription.

As the Chair of RACGP Queensland, I seek your support to overturn the decision by the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services, the Hon. Steven Miles MP, to support a trial allowing pharmacists in the state to:

- dispense antibiotics
- prescribe the contraceptive pill without the need for a prescription

This decision has been made outside of the national process currently underway by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPCC) working group, resulting in a fragmented prescribing and regulatory framework.

Antibiotics

At a time when the Federal Government is seeking to restrict the use of antibiotics in hospitals and primary care, Minister Miles' decision goes against global best practice.

Antibiotic resistance has been identified as one of the greatest threats to future human health. Already we see in our practices and in hospitals the effects of antibiotic resistant infections, colloquially known as 'superbugs'.

One of the goals of the National Antimicrobial Strategy is to promote proper use of antibiotics through effective stewardship practices.¹ Currently in Australia, one in five UTIs are resistant to trimethoprim,² the antibiotic recommended for the Queensland pharmacy prescribing trial.

Contraceptive pill

There is no such thing as 'just a pill script'. The pill is a risky medication and is no longer the first option for contraception.

A prescription for the pill involves a risk assessment and health screening opportunities, including a sexually transmissible infection (STI) check, cervical screening, blood pressure check, and an opportunity to discuss new and improved contraceptives. A retail pharmacy cannot provide these services.

Allowing pharmacists to dispense the contraceptive pill also goes against the recommendation of the Therapeutic Goods Administrations Independent Advisory Committee on scheduling, which warned against pharmacists dispensing of oral contraceptives in 2015.

This is a shortsighted decision. Allowing this trial will effectively create a separate category for Queensland pharmacists to operate outside of the Pharmacy Board of Australia, as well as the national governance framework for non-medical health prescribing administered by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and approved by all State Health Ministers at Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2016.

I urge you, as a member of the Queensland Parliament, to consider all aspects of the situation, including the risks to patient safety and improper antibiotic use. I also urge you to advise Minister Miles to make a decision in the national interest, one based on evidence of best practice.

The safety and care of all Queenslanders matters more than convenience, which is the proposed benefits of this trial. Future generations need antibiotics that work, and we owe it to them to do all we can to ensure they are available.

If you require further information on this matter, or wish to arrange a meeting with me, please contact James Flynn, RACGP Queensland State Manager, on 07 3456 8962 or james.flynn@racgp.org.au

Yours sincerely,



Dr Bruce Willett FRACGP
Chair, RACGP Queensland

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is the peak body for General Practice in Australia. The RACGP has over 40,000 members, including over 8000 members in urban, regional, rural and remote Queensland

¹ National AMR Strategy <https://www.amr.gov.au/australias-response/national-amr-strategy>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5053592/>