

**Review of Pharmacy Remuneration and Regulation**  
**Submission #8; 10-Aug-2016; Andrew Woodman**

As a consumer I have the following to say about pharmacies from my perspective.

Pharmacies should not be allowed to sell homeopathic or other "snake oil" treatments. They should, in my opinion, be illegal. At best they are expensive placebos, and at worst customers will purchase these "treatments" thinking they are getting real medicine and end up worse than they were before.

The following post on reddit is what prompted me to make this submission:

[https://www.reddit.com/r/australia/comments/4wvbs/swindled\\_at\\_a\\_pharmacist/](https://www.reddit.com/r/australia/comments/4wvbs/swindled_at_a_pharmacist/)

Here is the text of the comment in case the website is no longer available:

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There seems to be deeply contradictory about supplemental melatonin. The GP i went to about a sleep cycle problem told me I could buy it either Over The Counter(OTC) or by script. Other people that have apparently used it told me the same thing. So when I went to Priceline and asked where to get some it didn't occur to me to question the pill bottle with big letters saying MELATONIN. I should have been tipped off by the weird smile of the saleslady asking me "tell me how it goes when you come back".

Highly sleep deprived i took the recommended dose thinking it a bit weird that i needed to chew the tablet. As usual it still took me a couple of hours to get to sleep.

Looking into it after waking up i noticed in small letters 'Homeopathic'.

There may be some of you who don't know what this means I will enlighten you with some of what i've learnt. The process of homeopathy is to dilute a sample by putting 1ml of a sample and put it in a litre of water. Then you grab 1ml of this mixed solution and put it in another litre of water. So a 6X solution is diluted to 1 in  $1^{3*6}$ , or in other words there is 1,000,000,000,000,000,000 less of the sample in this homeopathic substance. It may as well not be there at all.

If that isn't enough there is a government review done on homeopathy and found "There was no reliable evidence from research in humans that homeopathy was effective for treating the range of health conditions considered"(nhmrc 2015). In other words it doesn't work, it's a placebo.

Now I don't know about you but when i'm trying to get treated in a course recommended by a GP I want to actually get the stuff that might help me rather than placebo pills. When i went to return the product i was told that being misled about a product containing useless quantities of medicine does not count as being sold a faulty product. In fact they do not have any non homeopathic OTC melatonin, but that isn't what they told me. They said that they have varying strengths with the 2mg being "prescription strength". To further mislead they have homeopathic OTC 3mg 5X tablets. Or tablets that contain way less than 3mg if you can do the math.

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This is an extremely misleading sales practice taking advantage of sick people. They're pushing non useful medicine in what can only be motivated by greed given that government reviews show it doesn't work. I hope that noone that reads this gets caught in the same trap as me. A homeopathic tablet is not the same thing as a regular tablet.

<http://whatstheharm.net/homeopathy.html>

TLDR: Asked for Melatonin was given magical homeopathy instead and not allowed a refund after being misled.

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It's clear that this person was at the very least confused about a "supplemental" treatment sold in a pharmacy and if he had not carefully read the label would not have ended up purchasing the medicine he needed.

Walk into any pharmacy and you will see shelves upon shelves of vitamins, homeopathic remedies and other supplements. These are all almost universally useless in the vast majority of cases, and I'm sure the pharmacists know this.

It looks to me that pharmacists are propping up their businesses on the backs of people who don't know any better. I'm sure the profit margins on this snake oil is much higher than PBS listed medications.

I feel having these alternative treatments available in a pharmacy lends undeserved legitimacy to the claims they make on their packaging. What's a uneducated consumer supposed to think when they walk into a pharmacy, a place that is trusted enough to sell opiates and cancer medication, and sees homeopathic medications sitting on the shelf? Perhaps they would think "They wouldn't be allowed to sell this unless it did something". They'd be wrong sadly, I believe that is a serious issue. People should be able to trust that the products they buy in a pharmacy work and that is currently not the case.

Finally I'd like to point out that by providing this legitimacy to alternative treatments pharmacists are indirectly contributing to anti-science movements including the anti-vaccination movement.

Thank You.

Andrew Woodman

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Long live the U in colour