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7 September 2016

Pharmacy Review (MDP 900)
Department of Health
GPO Box 9848
Canberra ACT 2601

RE: PHARMACY REMUNERATION AND REGULATION REVIEW

To whom it may concern.

Epilepsy Queensland has worked closely with the network of community pharmacies for a number of years. There is no health condition where the relationship between patient and pharmacist is more important. Pharmacists are instrumental in assisting our members every day in roles and support far beyond normal dispensing. Furthermore, the network of community pharmacies have assisted Epilepsy Queensland with fundraising and awareness campaigns to those members of our community who deal with epilepsy every day; particularly in rural and remote areas where health services are limited.

Like many other groups, we rely on the services that community pharmacists provide. We also want to sure these businesses remain viable. Their assistance as a contact point for advice and medication management for those living with epilepsy or caring for those with epilepsy is crucial.

As everyone's epilepsy is different, there is a need for an individual plan on how to manage the person's epilepsy. The community pharmacist plays an important role in developing individualised strategies for medication management in the epilepsy management plan.

In many cases, epileptic medication must be taken at certain times during the day. The community pharmacist often provides dose administration aids to people living with epilepsy, to ensure the correct and timely administration of medication. Furthermore, this important and life-saving assistance is often provided free of charge (or for a nominal fee) from the pharmacist. Innovative and flexible methods of engagement with customers is appreciated, especially by people who have mobility/transport challenges. The capacity to integrate digital/electronic technology with medication strategies is yielding even better adherence. Medication adherence is vital for seizure management. Investment of time and professional expertise in ensuring medication compliance saves health dollars. Medication compliance means fewer emergency admissions to hospitals, more productive members of the community, and potentially fewer sudden unexpected deaths in epilepsy.

Statistically, a diagnosis of epilepsy occurs most commonly in children under five and in older adults. However epilepsy can occur at any stage in childhood (or adulthood). With a high percentage of the population affected by epilepsy, 1 in 50, it is vital they continue to have convenient and timely access to medication. The Australian network of community pharmacies are highly accessible, both in terms of location and opening hours. They are certainly more accessible than most health services therefore the rules relating to this issue have served the public well.

Anecdotal evidence from our members suggests that the existing model of community pharmacy is positively regarded. They regard the community pharmacist as an important health professional, and enjoy the separation of pharmacy from medical services. There seems to be little support for pharmacies being part of supermarkets.

People with epilepsy and their families are aware of the services offered by their community pharmacy. Epilepsy Queensland enjoys a good working relationship with the community pharmacy network and regularly includes pharmacy related information in our newsletters. If it's deemed necessary, we suggest that educating health consumers about the services of community pharmacy for particular health conditions through health nongovernment organisations would be a more effective strategy than an expensive one-size-fits-all mass marketing approach.

Australia's current system and network of community pharmacies contributes a significant level of support to people living with epilepsy, their carers and the general community. This is a proven, customer focused healthcare model, unmatched by other models.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Helen Whitehead".

Helen Whitehead
Chief Executive Officer