

PCBC warns NSW against looser controls on prescription drugs

The Primary Care Business Council, the peak body for eight of the largest medical centre operators in the country, has warned the NSW Government against plans to loosen controls on the prescription of various medications.

NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet and Health Minister Brad Hazzard yesterday announced a trial permitting pharmacists to prescribe medications for antibiotics and medicines for urinary tract infections, gastro, allergies, skin conditions and other ailments.

Mr Perrottet claimed the measure would “take pressure off GPs,” but the PCBC, representing 5,500 GPs throughout Australia, said the measures were ill-considered and potentially dangerous.

PCBC Chair Dr Ged Foley said making it easier for pharmacists to prescribe drugs was not a remedy for a lack of access to doctors.

“More urgent action is needed to address an ongoing decline in the viability of general practice services throughout Australia, but circumventing medical supervision and advice is not the remedy,” Dr Foley said.

Dr Foley said the move by NSW demonstrated a serious lack of understanding of the critical role of the GP.

“The PCBC’s clinics and other GP services offer broad-based and deep medical knowledge from doctors skilled in the diagnostic process which involves taking a history, performing an examination and ordering appropriate investigations, then exercising judgement,” he said.

“That judgement comes from extensive training and experience and is based on both qualitative and quantitative criteria to initiate a health management plan.

“Initiatives such as this are aimed at specific disease states rather than the holistic care of patients, which is where the key expertise of GPs comes in to play. Failing to concentrate on patient-centred care risks adverse outcomes which could be easily avoided.

“It is not possible for many pharmacists to provide considered, confidential medical solutions in busy non-private, retail settings. In addition, many presentations do not require a prescription and the pressure on pharmacists to issue medication when faced with a problem sets up a clear conflict of interest.”

The PCBC urged the NSW Government to work with the Federal Government and other states to address a deepening crisis in primary health care, rather than pursue perceived short-term fixes with real risks of adverse health outcomes.

“GPs are the cornerstone of healthcare in our communities, are skilled in co-ordinating care and drive greater efficiencies in health care provision,” Dr Foley said. “The fact that State Governments feel impelled to take these steps should act as clear call to action for Federal Government to work with the healthcare industry to address the growing workforce shortage in General Practice.”

“Private general practice clinics are critical to Australians’ ability to access primary care services. No policy that ignores this will improve health outcomes for Australians.

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