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**Pharmacist prescribing a dangerous proposition which won't fix workforce issue**

The Australian Medical Association has urged the NSW State Government to abandon any consideration of a trial that would allow pharmacists to prescribe antibiotics for urinary tract infections, saying it will lead to poorer outcomes for patients.

AMA Federal President Professor Steve Robson said it was particularly frustrating that NSW would announce its intentions for the trial on the day of the General Practice Crisis Summit.

“There are critical issues facing general practice with years of underfunding pushing significant numbers of GPs to retire earlier, while fewer doctors are choosing general practice as a speciality,” Professor Robson said.

“Governments need to come to the table with viable solutions to support general practice and build collaborative models of care — not changes that completely undervalue the quality of care that is provided through general practice and fragment patient care.

“This dangerous experiment signals a lack of respect for general practice and the years of training, experience, and knowledge required to properly diagnose and treat a medical condition. If implemented in NSW, it will have dire consequences for the future of the workforce.”

Professor Robson said the trial was bad for general practice and there was also little prospect that it would alleviate pressure on our public hospitals.

“We know from the Queensland trial that it did not relieve pressure on emergency departments, but instead resulted in women waiting longer for treatment for conditions that are easily mistaken for UTIs, including pregnancy, pre-cancerous conditions, and sexually transmitted infections that can lead to infertility.”

The AMA has presented an alternative model that would allow medical professionals to work to the top of their scope of practice, but through a team-based model with pharmacists employed in GP practices.

“We want to work collaboratively with governments to find healthcare solutions that relieve workforce pressures, without compromising patient care,” Professor Robson said.

AMA NSW President, Dr Michael Bonning said it was disappointing that the health minister would push forward on a trial that was tested in Queensland and clearly negatively impacted on patients.

“Government is looking for quick fixes for the health system crisis, but pharmacist prescribing will result in higher healthcare costs and poorer patient outcomes,” Dr Bonning said.

“There is a conflict of interest in allowing pharmacists to both prescribe and dispense medicines — which is why general practitioners do not sell the medications they prescribe. It's confounding that the government is now considering a model that completely reverses this long-held principle.”

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