

Submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee's Inquiry into the implementation of the 1999 Joint Expert Technical Advisory Committee on Antibiotic Resistance

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Purpose

The purpose of this submission is to provide the views of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) on issues relevant to the Committee's Inquiry. The submission specifically addresses the following of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

- implications of antimicrobial resistance on public health and the environment; and
- any other related matter.

About PSA

PSA is the peak national professional pharmacy organisation representing Australia's pharmacists working in all sectors and locations. There are approximately 27,400 registered pharmacists,¹ of which approximately 80% work in the community sector.

PSA's core functions include: providing high quality continuing professional development, education and practice support to pharmacists; developing and advocating standards and guidelines to inform and enhance pharmacists' practice; and representing pharmacists' role as frontline health professionals.

Pharmacists and Antibiotics

The widespread impact and increasing prevalence of antibiotic resistance has been well-chronicled by the JETACAR report and by subsequent research. In addition, it is acknowledged that Australians are amongst the highest users of antibiotics in the developed world, with some 19 million prescriptions written every year.²

¹ Based on Pharmacy Board of Australia data released in December 2012.

² National Prescribing Service. Join the fight against antibiotic resistance. Available at: <http://www.nps.org.au/conditions-and-topics/topics/campaigns-events/antibiotic-resistance-fighter>

Recent research³ indicates that between July 2011 and July 2012, 94% of Australians aged 18 years and over reported using a pharmacy health care service. This proportion increases to 99% for Australians aged 65 years and over. In the same study, consumers provided the highest satisfaction rating for services provided by pharmacists with 89% providing a 'good-excellent' rating.

Pharmacists have an important role to play in educating consumers about the appropriate use of antibiotics. Given the accessibility of pharmacies and ease of access to pharmacists' services, together with consistently high-levels of trust in their advice, pharmacists are well-placed to provide opportunistic education and advice to consumers in this vital area.

The presentation of a consumer at a pharmacy with a prescription for an antibiotic provides an opportunity for a skilled health professional to promote the appropriate use of antibiotics to achieve the best health outcome, and to help control the development of antibiotic resistance. Intervention in these circumstances by a pharmacist could include:

- explaining the personal and community-wide impacts of antibiotic resistance
- ensuring that consumers have a good understanding of their illness and realistic expectations of its progression, especially with regard to colds and flu
- taking the opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of immunisation and to clarify any misconceptions.

It is important to highlight that pharmacists also regularly assist consumers even when a prescriber has made the appropriate evidence-based decision to not prescribe an antibiotic. In these cases the consumer may require advice on symptomatic treatment. Also in such circumstances, it is not uncommon for the pharmacist to have to manage any beliefs or ongoing expectations that the consumer may have about the need for an antibiotic. It is important that all health professionals have access to and are aware of the key consumer messages about appropriate use of antibiotics and their role in minimising the development of resistance.

PSA has discussed with key stakeholders, including the National Prescribing Service, ways in which pharmacists' expertise and accessibility can be more appropriately and consistently utilised in this area.

PSA has also developed a Fact Card on Antibiotics for consumers as part of its Self Care program (see copy at Appendix A). This and other Fact Cards are usually made available free-of-charge to consumers by participating community pharmacies.⁴

³ The Menzies-Nous Australian Health Survey 2012. 23 Oct 2012. Available at: www.menzieshealthpolicy.edu.au/mn_survey/Menzies-NousAustralianHealthSurveyReport2012.pdf

⁴ Further information about PSA's Self Care program is available at: <http://www.psa.org.au/supporting-practice/self-care>

Concluding Comments

PSA welcomes this Inquiry by the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee which serves to highlight the enormity of the task ahead in stemming the growth of antibiotic resistance.

PSA is a strong supporter of the NPS MedicineWise 'resistance fighter' campaign and other initiatives aimed at reducing the unnecessary use of antibiotics and halting the spread of antibiotic resistance. PSA will continue to work with NPS and other relevant stakeholders in increasing the contribution of pharmacists to this important activity.

Submitted by

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