

Superbug risk will rise if Queensland pharmacy trial continues

The Queensland government is exposing the community to one of the biggest global health risks, antibiotic resistant infections, as it prepares for a pharmacist antibiotic dispensing trial.

Queensland Chair of the RACGP, Dr Bruce Willett has again reiterated his grave concern around the government's push to relax the dispensing of an antibiotic to treat urinary tract infections (UTIs) and has called for the trial to be put on hold while national reviews around the levels of antibiotics in the community are conducted.

"The science is clear and backed by the United Nations, European Union and the World Health Organisation just to name a few. If we do not reduce the amount of antibiotics used we pose huge risks to our future generations.

"As doctors, we are seriously concerned about the growing rate of infections that are antibiotic resistant. Already, 1 in 5 UTIs is resistant to the medication this trial is proposing to use," Dr Willett said.

"If a patient's UTI is resistant to the antibiotic they are using, they can be left with an untreated condition, and potentially become susceptible to a superbug.

"Superbugs are a huge threat to our health system because they have built up resistance to antibiotics leaving us with no effective treatment available.

"To make things even worse, diagnosing a UTI is not a straightforward matter that can be diagnosed in a pharmacy setting. Many sexually transmitted infections and more serious conditions like diabetes and cancer can masquerade as a UTI, so this trial poses a significant risk to patients' health."

The trial is bucking global health advice to reduce the level of antibiotics in the community, with experts predicting that global deaths due to superbugs may surge to 10 million a year by 2050, 22,000 of those from the Oceania region.

"Doctors across the country, including GPs, are collectively reducing unnecessary antibiotic prescribing due to the identified global health risks. We know we don't always get it right and we're seeking to prescribe less. Introducing more and less experienced prescribers will only exacerbate the current challenges we have with overprescribing.

"We must see the brakes put on this trial until the Australia's Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy 2020 and Beyond has been handed down by the Australian Governments Departments of Health and Agriculture."

The RACGP represents 40,000 members working in or towards a career in general practice, with over 8,000 members providing over 30 million services a year in Queensland with their practice teams.

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