

16 August 2016

Department of Health
Pharmacy Review (MDP 900)
GPO Box 4898
CANBERRA ACT 2600

RE: Submission to the Review of Pharmacy Remuneration and Regulation

Carers Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Review of Pharmacy Remuneration and Regulation to the expert review panel, and we look forward to reading the final report next year.

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing the diversity of Australians who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a: disability; chronic condition; mental illness or disorder; drug or alcohol problem; terminal illness; and/or who are frail aged.

The *Review of Pharmacy and Remuneration and Regulation Discussion Paper* raises a range of issues in which Carers Australia has a keen interest (including addressing gaps in regional and remote access to services and medication). However, we do not have the expertise to address most of the technical questions asked in the Paper.

Our response is focused on the Consumer Experience section and, in particular, question 132:

“How can we encourage and support consumers to engage more with their local pharmacy and what specific patient groups require more general awareness about available pharmacy services?”

We would add to this question:

“Where do pharmacy services require more general awareness in relation to specific patient groups and other consumers of their services?”

Pharmacy services are extremely important to family and friend carers – both with respect to their own health and wellbeing and to the health and wellbeing of those they care for. Not only are they frequently intensive users of such services, but pharmacists are prized as a respected and accessible source of information on health concerns – especially for people who are time poor and find it hard to access GPs on a regular basis.

Carers as direct users of pharmacy services and products

Carers are high users of pharmacy services in the own right – especially primary carers, who are those who provide the most substantial amount of care to one or more people with disability, chronic illness, mental illness or who are frail aged.

The most recently released Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (2012, Australian Bureau of Statistics) found that:

- 37% of primary carers have a disability
- 27% of primary carers feel frequently worried or depressed due to their caring role
- 10% of primary carers have been diagnosed with a stress-related illness
- 38% of primary carers report that their physical or emotional wellbeing has changed due to their caring role
- 24% of primary carers report needing further assistance in their caring role.

The stress of caring can make a significant contribution to the deteriorating health and wellbeing of carers. It is widely recognised that carers tend to neglect their own health because so much of their focus is on the person they are caring for. Ideally, where pharmacy assistants or pharmacists become aware that a customer has a caring role, it would be of benefit to make them aware of services which are available to assist them to cope. These may include respite services, counselling, peer support, and carer training opportunities. Many carers will not be aware these services are available to them and, in some cases, may not identify with the term “carer” (even though it is clear they put in significant hours, weeks and sometimes years of care for a family member or friend.) It is Carers Australia’s understanding that information on carer services will be distributed to pharmacies in the near future via a range of media by the Department of Social Services under the banner of the National Carer Gateway. At a minimum, carers could be made aware that there are services in their local area which can be contacted through 1800 242 636.

In terms of identifying whether the customer is a carer, the clues may be fairly obvious:

- Do they bring in prescription to fill or collect prescription medication for someone else?
- Do they seek advice on behalf of someone else?
- Do they bring someone who they clearly care for with them into the pharmacy regularly?

It doesn’t take much of an extra effort to engage them in a discussion about the degree of their caring responsibilities and how they are coping.

Carers acting on behalf of those they care for

Importantly, carers are often responsible for both purchasing and administering a range of pharmacy products on behalf of the person they care for. This includes both prescription and non-prescription medications as well as wound management and specialist hygiene products and aids and equipment.

The task of medication management can present a challenge to carers who are responsible for: administering multiple medications in the correct dosage and at the correct frequency; ensuring that they are properly stored and have not exceeded the expiry date; and monitoring and reporting side-effects. Times at which medication management is likely to be particularly challenging are where medications change (particularly after discharge from hospital). Similarly, carers often need assistance and advice in the proper use of aids and equipment, hygiene products and skin care management for the people they care for. It is important to note that carers responsible for attending to someone else's healthcare needs report suffering great stress and guilt if for some reason they get in wrong.

The relevance of all this in relation to pharmacy services is that pharmacy staff and pharmacists need to recognise that carers are not just couriers/purchasers of medicines and other products dispensed by pharmacies and they need as much information about them as the consumer. In this context we note the national *Carers Recognition Act (2010)* aims to increase recognition and awareness of the role carers play in providing daily care and support to people with disability, medical conditions, mental illness or who are frail aged. In particular, the Act states that the relationship between carers and the persons for whom they care should be recognised and respected and that carers should be considered as partners with other care providers in the provision of care, acknowledging the unique knowledge and experience of carers.

Carers Australia is of the view that there is scope to improve the recognition of carers and their legitimate need to seek assistance and advice with respect to the people they are caring for in the *Community Pharmacy Service Charter*. (There is a broad reference to carers and families in the preamble to the *Charter*, but otherwise it is very specific to direct consumers.)

Generally, financial considerations are something that carers – and especially primary carers - are concerned with on a regular basis. Seventy percent of co-resident primary carers provide more than 40 hours of care a week and over 60% are not employed with, 55% relying on income support payments (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers). The negative financial impact on households where both the carer and another person are in receipt of income support is particularly stark. Recognising the financial constraints faced by such consumers and assisting them to select products which represent value for money or alerting them to subsidised purchases for which they or the people they care for may be eligible for can make a big difference.

Comment on other areas of the Discussion Paper

Alternative Arrangements to Remunerate Pharmacists for Services

Carers Australia supports proposals to ensure that pharmacists are better placed to improve consumer health outcomes, the quality use of services and prevention of medication misadventure by including them in multidisciplinary health care teams and in primary health settings. However, we are not well placed to determine whether this is best done through adjustments to the Medical Benefits Schedule, the new Health Care Homes, collaboration through Primary Health Networks or all of the above.

Home Medicines Reviews (HMR) program

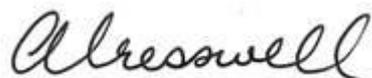
On page 25 of the Discussion Paper it is noted that:

“...in the case of the Home Medicines Reviews (HMR) program funded under the 5CPA, it became apparent during the Agreement, that the five-year funding allocation for this program would be exceeded. Additional funds were transferred from another area of the Agreement and a cap was introduced on the number of HMRs that a pharmacy could undertake each year.”

We would simply like to note that the HMRs are highly valued by many carers, especially those administering multiple prescription and non-prescription medication (which may have accumulated over considerable time) and who, due to their caring responsibilities, are often substantially house-bound.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide commentary on the Review of Pharmacy Remuneration and Regulation, and to provide some insight into the interaction of carers with pharmacies. I can be contacted on (02) 6122 9900 or at acresswell@carersaustralia.com.au should you wish to discuss this further.

With kind regards



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Chief Executive Officer

Carers Australia