



4 August 2020

Mr Aaron Harper
Chair
Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee
Queensland Parliament
Corner of George and Alice Streets
Brisbane 4000 QLD

Dear Mr Harper,

RE: Inquiry into the QLD Government's Health Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia is the national professional organisation for more than 5,000 pharmacists, pharmacists in training, pharmacy technicians and associates working across Australia's health system. SHPA is committed to facilitating the safe and effective use of medicines, which is the core business of pharmacists, especially in hospitals.

SHPA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the inquiry into the Queensland Government's health response to COVID-19. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Australian healthcare system has been substantial, and SHPA along with its members are proud to have played a significant role.

SHPA would like to thank the Queensland Government for their effective leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, changes made by the Queensland Department of Health to regulations regarding:

- electronic transmission of digital image prescriptions (*Validation of giving, and dispensing on, digital images of prescriptions during relevant period, Section 320, Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulation 1996*) and
- emergency supply of medicines (*Drug Therapy Protocol – Communicable Diseases Program pursuant to the Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulation 1996*)

enabled pharmacists to enable continuous supply of critical medicines for chronic conditions whilst reducing the risk of community transmission posed by hospital outpatients having to attend hospitals in person. SHPA commends the implementation of such measures to complement legislative and regulatory changes made nationally regarding telehealth consultations and prescriptions to ensure safe medicines access and medicines adherence for Queenslanders.

Please see attached SHPA's submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which discusses the challenges faced by Australian hospitals throughout the COVID-19 pandemic including; medicines supply and access, hospital preparedness and workforce capacity. These findings were supported by SHPA's Hospital Pharmacy Capacity Snapshot survey series which lasted for five weeks between April – May 2020.

The single largest concern experienced by Directors of Pharmacy, Chief Pharmacists and SHPA members nationally was the immense difficulty experienced by hospital pharmacy departments to procure critical medicines for the anticipated surge of patients requiring ventilation in intensive care units. Whilst governments placed a high priority on obtaining personal protective equipment and ventilators, in the early stages of the



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pandemic the difficulties that would be faced by Australia's hospitals in obtaining the medicines necessary to use ventilators does not appear to have been appreciated. These medicines include, but are not limited to:

- propofol – induction agent for intubation, sedative agent for ventilation
- cisatracurium, atracurium, rocuronium, vecuronium, pancuronium – neuromuscular blockers to facilitate intubation and ventilation
- midazolam, fentanyl – induction agents for intubation, sedative agents for ventilation

In the initial weeks of our survey, participating Australian hospital pharmacies reported 80% of orders for propofol were either being placed on backorder or only supplied in part quantities. The survey also found that in four out of the five weeks surveyed, the majority of orders for neuromuscular blockers were placed on backorder, with less than 30% of these orders being supplied in full. Overall, regional and rural hospitals – with fewer options and less workforce capacity to manage procurement – experienced a greater rate of orders being placed on backorder. SHPA does not claim this information represents a complete picture of hospital pharmacy in Queensland during this time and offers it for interest and review only.

SHPA notes that Queensland Health has centralised hospital pharmacy services to co-ordinate oversight of purchasing, warehousing, and distribution of medicines to public hospitals, and established the COVID-19 Medications and Pharmacy Planning and Response Group. This oversight is extremely helpful in directing the timely coordination of key medicine stocks to hospital sites that are in need in the event of a localised surge of COVID-19 cases.

Looking forward, SHPA provides this information for the consideration of the government in any future planning for public health emergencies. If you have any queries or would like to discuss our submission further, please do not hesitate to contact Johanna de Wever, General Manager, Advocacy and Leadership on jdeweever@shpa.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'K. Michaels'.

Kristin Michaels
Chief Executive

Attachments

SHPA Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic



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