



Submission no. 331

AUTHORISED: 30/5/07 *B*

The PHARMACY GUILD of AUSTRALIA

File: POLGOV-CCB-HRSC-PVT

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

23rd March 2007

Mr. James Catchpole
Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr. Catchpole,

Inquiry into the Health Benefits of Breastfeeding

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the Health Benefits of Breastfeeding in Australia and for accepting to receive our comments after the required submission date. I sincerely apologise for the delay in replying to you.

Outlined in the attached submission are some of the areas in which The Pharmacy Guild of Australia believes community pharmacy can help the Government in improving the health of the Australian population through support for breastfeeding in Australia.

We have responded only to those aspects of the terms of reference of the Inquiry where we have a particular interest from pharmacy's perspective and where we believe community pharmacy would be engaged to achieve improved coordination and delivery of appropriate information, promotion and awareness about breastfeeding in Australia.

I trust that our submission is useful in assisting the Committee with its Inquiry and that our proposals will be reflected in your final recommendations. We look forward to hearing from you with the outcome of the Inquiry.

If you require further information or any clarification, please do not hesitate to contact Jenny Bergin, Director of Community Pharmacy Practice at the Guild National Secretariat on (02) 6270 1888.

Yours sincerely,

Kieran Schneeman
Executive Director

Inquiry into the Health Benefits of Breastfeeding in Australia

Introduction

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia is an employers' organisation servicing the needs of independent community pharmacies. It exists for the protection and betterment of its members and to maintain community pharmacies as the most appropriate primary providers of health care to the community through optimum therapeutic use of medicines, medicine management and related services.

Community pharmacy offers a highly accessible network of primary health care providers providing quality advice and service. Pharmacies exist in well spread out and accessible locations, are computerised and often operate over extended hours seven days a week in urban, rural and remote areas. On average each man, woman and child visits a community pharmacy 14 times each year, in metropolitan, rural and remote, hospital and indigenous community settings.

In recent years pharmacists' roles have continued to expand from dispensing medications with an increased emphasis on working with other health care professionals to give services to the public as part of the health care team. There is an ever-increasing body of evidence to demonstrate that community pharmacists can and do perform countless activities that benefit patients and doctors, save money for the purchasers of health services and enhance the delivery of primary health care services.¹

Community pharmacists currently provide a variety of services which extend well beyond the provision of prescription medicines and, as such, pharmacies are often the first contact point of the primary health care system for many people. These services include:

- provision of information about medicines and health conditions;
- provision of up-to-date and locally relevant information on other health care services and resources;
- participation in community health, preventative health and other public health services;
- distribution of public health information and educational materials;
- referral to a General Practitioner or Hospital Emergency Services; and
- referral to other appropriate allied health professionals where required; eg community health nurses, mental health services, drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities etc.

Pharmacies would present an ideal environment in which to promote the extensive benefits of breastfeeding to the general public, and represent as an excellent portal from which to spread this message.

¹ The Value of Professional Pharmacist Services in the Community Setting
A systemic review of the literature 1990-2002

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia endorses the statement of the World Health Organisation (WHO) that:

“Breastfeeding is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants; it is also an integral part of the reproductive process with important implications for the health of mothers. As a global public health recommendation, infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. Thereafter, to meet their evolving nutritional requirements, infants should receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues for up to two years of age or beyond.”²

How Pharmacists can be Involved in Improving the Health of the Australian Population through support for Breastfeeding

In this submission, The Pharmacy Guild of Australia has identified areas where community pharmacy can contribute to improving the health of the Australian population through promotion of the benefits of breastfeeding.

Pharmacies are a primary supplier of a wide range of baby products including but not limited to: nappies, toys, bibs, and baby bath and skin care products. A number of pharmacies also offer a baby clinic service, where a registered nurse is placed in a pharmacy for a number of hours per week to provide a baby health service. This program is supported by in-store promotions, consumer information and brochures. Pharmacists are also often involved in incidental counselling with parents of babies and infants who may have colic, minor ear or gastro-intestinal infections and problems associated with teething.

These pharmacy services are examples of situations when pharmacists would have multiple opportunities in which to engage parents and the general public on the benefits and active promotion of breastfeeding.

Pharmacists can also help play a key role in the promotion of the health benefits of breastfeeding by providing health promotion leaflets and valuable public awareness services through their pharmacies. Pharmacists are also continually involved in pharmacy-related programs which are implemented by many health organisations to raise awareness through pharmacies, of specific conditions, diseases and ways to prevent or treat them. One such successful pharmacy-related program which is an initiative of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia is ‘Ask your Pharmacist’ campaign.

‘Ask your Pharmacist’ is a consumer marketed campaign which helps promote consumer awareness about various health-related issues through sponsored segments on radio and television programs, and also through the ‘Ask your Pharmacist’ website. The key message of the campaign is to encourage the general public to make better use of the free and accessible knowledge of pharmacists by asking their local pharmacists about health issues they may be concerned about or want to know more about. The ‘Ask your Pharmacist’ campaign is an excellent example of one of the

² World Health Assembly (54th), 'Infant and Young Child Nutrition: Resolution 54.2' (World Health Assembly) Geneva, 2001.

ways in which pharmacists could help promote and raise awareness to the general public and parents about the benefits of breastfeeding.

Pharmacists could also be involved in a number of ways in helping to promote and provide valuable information to the public in the lead up to and during the course of 'National Mothering Week', an event that aims to encourage and support mothers who wish to breastfeed their babies and also promoting community awareness of the importance of human milk.

Another important way that pharmacists may become involved in this initiative, would be by providing advice and information to potential breastfeeding mothers, who may be taking medication and worrying if this may affect their baby in some way. In these instances, pharmacists are well placed to give the mothers information about which medicines may or may not affect their babies, and would also be able to suggest possible alternatives to the medicines if necessary.

Conclusion

It is evident that community pharmacists would play a vital role in helping to promote public awareness about the benefits of breastfeeding, and community pharmacies are ideally placed to assist in the delivery of these services.

Community pharmacy is often an undervalued or overlooked community resource that could be better engaged and utilised by Government and by other health care providers in implementing community-based health programs and providing primary health care services in order to increase the benefits for the individuals and the community.

The Guild is willing to assist with any Government initiative where community pharmacy is engaged to achieve best practice outcomes in helping to improve the health of Australians through support and promotion of breastfeeding.