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Act, the ‘efficiency’ party, proposes dangerous, wasteful pharmacy scheme

Act’s plan to outsource basic healthcare is an admission the system is failing, says General Practitioners Aotearoa (GPA).

Last week the Act Party proposed expanding the conditions pharmacists are allowed to treat.

“This is truly bizarre behaviour from a party that claims to champion efficiency and fiscal responsibility,” says GPA chair Dr Buzz Burrell.

“We already have a system set up to treat these so-called minor ailments: your GP.

“Act isn’t innovating, they are recklessly setting up a shadow system instead of supporting the existing one to do its job.”

Burrell says this policy is a red flag for an ailing health system.

“It’s as simple as this: you don’t outsource from a healthy health system. David Seymour is an Associate Minister of Health, so this scheme is an admission of his own failure.”

Outsourcing is a costly and temporary solution to the problem of GP clinics operating over capacity.

“Act has earmarked up to \$100 million per year for this scheme,” Burrell says. “So why not put those funds into general practice and help fix the root issue?”

Burrell says continued underfunding of primary healthcare means that pharmacies, too, will soon be over capacity.

“So when this outsourcing fails, who do they outsource to next? Several Act press releases later and we’ll be seeking treatment in the Woolworths drug aisle.

“The buck has to stop somewhere, so let’s stop it right here and get GPs funded to treat their own patients.”

Most GP clinics are owned by the GPs that work in them.

“Act is supposedly all about supporting Kiwi businesses,” Burrell says. “It blows me away that they want to funnel funding into the big pharmacy chains, many of which are Australian-owned.”

Many of the so-called minor ailments Act has proposed for pharmacist treatment could mask more serious issues.

Minor ailments are often the tip of the iceberg, hiding conditions like rheumatic fever, sepsis, ectopic

pregnancy and carcinoma.

“Sure, a sore throat may just be a sore throat,” Burrell says. “Or it could be a retropharyngeal abscess about to block your airway, or an early head and neck cancer.”

GPs don't just check symptoms, they are diagnosis experts who look at the whole picture.

“Skipping the GP is a dangerous gamble with patient safety,” Burrell says. “You can easily miss that critical window to catch a catastrophic illness before it's too late.”

Burrell says this is what GPs are trained for.

“There's clearly money in the kitty, so let's get that funding to GPs so we can continue our mahi, strengthen our workforce to treat and prevent these ailments.”

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Contact for comment

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