

30 November 2018

MS J.M Freeman MLA
Education and Health Standing Committee
via email
laehsc@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Ms Freeman

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information regarding the Pharmacy Management of Meal Replacement programs as a part of your inquiry into the role of diet in Type 2 diabetes prevention and management.

About PSA

PSA is the peak national professional pharmacy organisation representing Australia's 31,000 pharmacists¹ working in all sectors and locations.

PSA's core functions relevant to pharmacists include:

- providing high quality continuing professional development, education and practice support to pharmacists
- developing and advocating standards and guidelines to inform and enhance pharmacists' practice, and
- representing pharmacists' role as frontline health professionals.

PSA is also a registered training organisation and offers qualifications including certificate and diploma-level courses tailored for pharmacists, pharmacy assistants and interns.

Pharmacy Management of Meal Replacement Programs

Very Low Calorie Diets (VLCDs)

VLCDs, which are also referred to as very low energy diets, are useful in certain circumstances.^{2,3}

Total meal replacement programs or Very Low Calorie Diets (VLCDs) – where all meals are replaced with a shake, bar or soup – work by restricting one's carbohydrate intake, causing their body to burn fat stores for 'fuel'. This process, called ketosis, helps reduce appetite and prevents the loss of lean muscle tissue.

The weight reduction achieved on VLCD can be as much as 12 to 20 kg in three months, with initial rapid weight loss attributable to fluid loss. It is described as protein-sparing as the proportion of lean tissue lost is less than fat.

VLCD is useful to enable initial weight loss in patients with limited mobility as it can induce a negative energy balance despite little activity. It can be of benefit in patients with morbid obesity, particularly if the weight reduction allows return to more usual levels of activity. 2,4 Weight regain after VLCD is common, especially if activity levels are unaltered, hence this needs to be taken into consideration when planning weight management programs in any settings involving the use of meal replacements with VLCD diets.

Response to queries

- 1. Are the consultations always with pharmacists?*
- 2. Do all pharmacies have access to staff who are qualified to provide the necessary nutritional or dietary advice, and is this regarded as necessary?*
- 3. Do pharmacies have the resources to meet the recommended consultation duration and frequency?*
- 4. How much support is provided by the product manufacturer?*
- 5. Has demand for meal replacement shakes increased?*

Pharmacists in Australia are one of the largest, most trusted and most accessible groups of health professionals. Similarly, community pharmacies in Australia have provided, and will continue to provide a vital network for primary and preventative community-based health care.

Community pharmacies are an essential part of the health landscape and the various models of community pharmacy enable consumers to self-select the pharmacy service that best suits their needs. Some community pharmacies will offer specialist programs and services such as structured meal replacement and other weight loss programs.

Community pharmacies will not all provide enhanced meal replacement programs, however VLCD diet products, such as Optifast® will likely be available from the majority of pharmacies. A pharmacist is required, by law, to be onsite and supervising all activities within the pharmacy. However dependent on the model for the individual practice site, a pharmacist may not be the provider of all consultations. Pharmacies that provide this service would ensure appropriate staff capability, through recruitment and training, and also capacity through appropriate staffing.

Meal replacement products are non-scheduled items, which according to legislation may be able to be supplied over the counter without direct consultation with a pharmacist. However, if a

consumer requests for specific advice about weight management or diet and/or if the interaction requires further consultation, cases will often be directed to a pharmacist.

As community pharmacists are involved in the provision of a range of professional services, the majority of pharmacies have a consultation area in the pharmacy which will be suitable for private consultations about weight management. Community pharmacies have also been involved in point-of-care testings (e.g. blood pressure, blood glucose and cholesterol levels) which may be used as part of the parameters when monitoring patients on weight management/meal replacement programs.

The accessibility and credibility of pharmacists mean that pharmacists are ideally placed to provide advice and counselling on a range of health issues. In the current context of weight loss, the accessibility and rapport that pharmacists have with the community they serve place them in a unique position to initiate and engage in opportunistic weight management conversations. In addition, pharmacists see patients with chronic health conditions who require regular use of prescription medicines, e.g. diabetes and cardiovascular conditions. This further presents opportunity for pharmacists to facilitate weight management programs including regular monitoring of patients' progress.

Due to accessibility of community pharmacies many consumers will seek advice about weight management in this setting. Pharmacists will refer to a GP or other relevant health professional, if they feel this is outside of their scope of practice.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can clarify any of the comments above or additional information is required.

Sincerely,

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References

Pharmacy Board of Australia. Registrant data. Reporting period: 1 July 2018 – 30 September 2018. At:

<https://www.pharmacyboard.gov.au/About/Statistics.aspx>

2 Murtagh J. General Practice, 6th edn. Sydney: McGraw-Hill, 2015.

3 eMIMs. CMPMedica Australia, July 2018

4 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/n55>