

Tuesday, 28 November 2023

Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry
Australian Government
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

To whom It may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the Australian Commonwealth Government's Inquiry into the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Australasian Society of Clinical and Experimental Pharmacologists (ASCEPT) is the peak professional society devoted to advancing excellence in Clinical and Experimental Pharmacology and Toxicology in Australasia. Many of our members made invaluable contributions to the pandemic response locally, nationally and internationally.

There are a number of core pharmacology principles underlying therapeutic decision making that should have been more fastidiously adopted in the pandemic response.⁽¹⁾

These include:

- (1) Applying principles of best practice in pre-clinical lead compound design and drug repurposing
- (2) applying pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic principles to identify the plausibility of potential therapies
- (3) robust, nationally coordinated and efficient clinical trial design
- (4) timely and effective communication to consumers and health care practitioners of trial outcomes and
- (5) equitable and timely access to treatments
- (6) timely access to routinely collected health data to facilitate observational studies of vaccines and treatments
- (7) leadership from the diverse specialist craft groups within ASCEPT from basic pre-clinical to clinical pharmacology in the coordination of the above activities

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Application of these principles can optimise use of effective pharmacological interventions (vaccines and treatments) and minimise use of ineffective interventions.

In the pandemic response, there were a number of domains where significant Clinical Pharmacologist, Experimental Pharmacologist and Toxicologist contribution was important and should be replicated in any subsequent pandemic response. These include contributions to:

1. the National Clinical Evidence Taskforce. There was and will be a need for rapid assessment of data but consistent high quality assessment
2. evidence synthesis and effective communication to health care practitioners
3. providing expert review for clinical trials of potential COVID therapies through Human Research and Ethics Committees

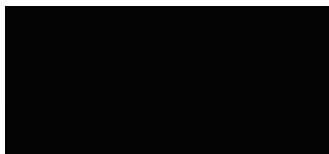
There were a number of domains that were clearly deficient in the pandemic response. Pharmacologist contribution in these domains would likely have improved outcomes and should be considered in any subsequent pandemic response. These include:

1. community messaging about the risk:benefit of vaccine safety (particularly the Astra Zeneca vaccine), which was inadequate
2. early access to vaccines
3. community messaging around vaccine and treatment safety to counter misinformation, particularly early in the pandemic
4. developing local manufacturing capacity for medicines (both for pandemic and non-pandemic medicines). There were various supply chain issues throughout the pandemic, which resulted in shortages of a number of medicines.

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The absence of a national medicines information service that can provide unbiased, trusted information to all health professionals providing care is a notable deficit in the Australian medicine's landscape, as is the recent de-funding of the National Prescribing Service. Medicines information needs to be underpinned by robust clinical pharmacology learning and implementation. We strongly encourage the development of such a service prior to the next emergency situation such that communication pathways and networks are already established.

Yours sincerely



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Australasian Society of Clinical and Experimental Pharmacologists and Toxicologists

- (1) Baker EH, Gnjjidic D, Kirkpatrick CMJ, Pirmohamed M, Wright DFB, Zecharia AY. A call for the appropriate application of clinical pharmacological principles in the search for safe and efficacious COVID-19 (SARS-COV-2) treatments. *Br J Clin Pharmacol.* 2021 Mar;87(3):707-711. doi: 10.1111/bcp.14416. Epub 2020 Jun 19. PMID: 32515023.

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