

# NFTHD #69: How the Code applies to prescribing pharmacists

Several jurisdictions have introduced pharmacists carrying out diagnosis and prescribing practices, including Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. With this development, we examine how this impacts our role in the health ecosystem, and specifically, how this intersects with the Code of Conduct and its scope.

States and Territories are responsible for determining which healthcare professionals can prescribe, dispense, and administer medicines. The Australian Government remains responsible for the assessment of safety and scheduling of medicines and funding cost-effective treatment and services. Nothing in the above-mentioned trials impacts the application of the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989 (Act). Section 42AA of the Act provides rules for advertising therapeutic goods and does not apply to advertisements directed exclusively to health professionals, such as pharmacist prescribers.

In examining how the Code intersects with pharmacists prescribing – there is no change and no difference; the Code sets the standard for ethical behaviour for how pharmaceutical companies interact with healthcare professionals. Pharmacists are healthcare professionals. The Code's definition is aligned with the Act, and doesn't differentiate between those who prescribe and those who dispense; they are all one and the same in terms of how a company may interact with them, and how they can be promoted to, in line with the Code's ethical principles.

Overarching Principle 5 of the Code rings true; nothing is to be offered or provided by a company in a manner or with conditions that would have an inappropriate influence on the approval, recommendation, prescribing/and or use of a product.

Unpacking this further, marketing of off-patent medicines typically seeks to change behaviour at the point of dispensing and not prescribing, on the rationale that it is unlikely to create any change to the health outcomes for the patient because the prescribing decision has already been made. Any such marketing is permitted if it aligns with the principles of the Code, which remains a condition of registration for any prescription medicine, originator brand or generic. Importantly, incentives are not to be provided to pharmacists for preferential dispensing of certain brands of products. This principle remains particularly poignant now pharmacists are receiving prescribing rights.

Our Code is the industry Code; it sets an ethical standard of conduct so that the environment in which we provided access to medicines is sustainable and fair.

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