

Publication:The Dominion Post;**Date:**Mar 1, 2007;**Section:**Local;**Page Number:**7

Bill lets druggists give shots

Delegates, students want pharmacy vaccines

BY MARK PATRICK GRANDSTAFF *The Dominion Post*

INFO: 382-1246, legis.state.wv.us

WVU students are pushing state lawmakers to pass a bill that would allow pharmacists to give disease immunizations to adults.

West Virginia is one of only five states that do not allow pharmacists to immunize, said Amanda Preston, member-at-large of the Academy of Student Pharmacists branch of the American Pharmacists Association.

West Virginia House Bill 3056, introduced by Delegate Don Perdue, D-Wayne, could change that. If passed into law, the bill will let pharmacists give immunizations to people 18 or older for influenza and pneumonia. The bill was passed to the Senate on Tuesday.

In its original form, the bill also allowed for immunizations for hepatitis A and B and tetanus, but this portion was taken out after feedback from the state pharmacy and medicine boards, said Delegate Barbara Fleischauer, D-Monongalia.

"They were more concerned that there may be complications from the vaccines" for hepatitis and tetanus, Fleischauer said. "They weren't sure what systems were set up to monitor patients. That's why they took the other vaccinations off."

The vaccines would be delivered by injection, she said. She did not know if oral spray alternatives would be available.

Fleischauer said she received many letters of support for the bill. WVU's student pharmacists had encouraged about 100 students, faculty and friends to mail letters to state delegates encouraging support of the bill, said Erica Brown, chair of the Operation: Immunization committee, which works to promote immunization by pharmacists.

"I think it's an excellent opportunity for everyone in West Virginia," Brown said. "I think it would be a great advancement in preventative health-care choices in West Virginia."

Once the bill becomes law, pharmacists would need a day's worth of training classes to be able to give immunizations, said Karl Sommer, pharmacist at Waterfront Family Pharmacy. Some West Virginia pharmacists have already completed the training and are just waiting on the bill's passage, he said. Sommer said he would provide immunizations if the bill is passed.

The bill in its current form would go into effect 90 days after passage. It will be up to the state pharmacy board to determine what certifications pharmacists need to immunize, Fleischauer said, but she said it is likely the board will accept certifications and training courses from other states.

If state pharmacists are allowed to immunize, state residents will enjoy greater protection from disease, Sommer said. Local pharmacies are often easier to reach than medical centers in the rural areas of West Virginia.

The pharmacies would also be able to offer cheaper vaccinations, since people would not have to pay doctor's office fees on top of the cost of the vaccine, Fleischauer said.

She said she wasn't sure if pricing would need to be regulated. "The main thing is, we want to encourage people to get immunized."

The bill would also propel the state closer to meeting the goals of the Healthy 2010 national project, which calls for adult immunization rates to reach 90 percent of the population, Preston said.

"We're just trying to help our patients as best we can," Preston said. "We don't want to upset any of the other health-care professionals or make them think we're stepping on their toes."