



Enterprise bargaining pact for pharmacy

NATIONAL Pharmacies last month finalised a Certified Agreement with the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists & Managers Australia (APESMA) which saw pharmacist employees gaining a 5.5% pay increase.

Currently the deal is the only Enterprise Bargaining Agreement in place in community pharmacy, but APESMA Pharmacists Division President, Geoff March, told PD that "wee feel that this workplace relations instrument should be used more widely simply as it provides the opportunity for both employer and employees to talk though and agree upon what things best suit them."

As well as the pay rise effective 16 Mar, the deal includes further annual increases from 01 Dec 09 and 01 Dec 10; it also ensures payment for travel for relief pharmacists, as well as for meal breaks where required on site.

"A pleasing aspect of the agreement is the recognition by National Pharmacies of the up-skilling and specialty services that employee pharmacists can provide," March said.

"Pharmacists conducting Home Medication Reviews or Reviews in Residential Aged Care Facilities receive a special rated of pay, payment for training, registration costs, provision of specified resources and a travel allowance."

March said the advent of centralised administration by many pharmacy owners is an opportunity to arrange EBAs which suit both employee pharmacists and owners.

National Pharmacies operates 35 outlets in South Australia as well as 23 in Victoria and one in NSW.

PBS reimbursements up 18%

MEDICARE Australia paid out \$1.963 billion in PBS and RPBS reimbursements during the first three months of the year, up 18% on the \$1.652 billion paid out during the previous corresponding period.

Overall prescription numbers rose 14% to 51.4 million during the quarter, but there was a much faster rise in the number of scripts filled under the PBS Safety Net, which grew from 9.7 million in the first three months of last year to more than 13.3 million so far in 2009 - an increase of 37.5%, which some are attributing to the poor economic situation.

The figures come as the govt is reportedly considering bringing forward PBS reforms in the budget, with reports earlier this month

suggesting that prices on up to 100 popular medicines could be cut.

A story in Saturday's *Australian* also suggested that the govt may consider caps on the Safety Net as part of measures to rein in budget spending as the global financial crisis bites into revenue.

The increase may not be as significant as indicated by the statistics, with the figures affected by the timing of claims processing, as well as Easter falling in March last year which would have reduced the number of days available for claims in the period.

Dispensing error kills 21 polo ponies

A PHARMACY in the USA has admitted incorrectly preparing a special nutritional supplement for 21 polo ponies which caused them to collapse and die in front of the crowd at an international tournament.

Franck's Pharmacy in Ocala, Florida said it mixed the medication on the orders of a veterinarian working for the Venezuelan polo team, with an internal investigation concluding that the strength of one of the ingredients was incorrect.

Reports say the horses started to die as they were unloaded from their trailers, falling to the ground on the lawns in front of onlookers.

Apparently the Venezuelan team usually uses a manufactured supplement, but in this case went to a compounding pharmacy to obtain the medication.

Corum incentive

CORUM Health is promoting its new integrated EFTPOS facility with an incentive offering free Ambassador Cards, valued at \$199, to the first ten people to accurately complete an online entry each day this week at its website www.corumhealth.com.au/dynamicpages.aspx?cid=100.

Alcohol ad changes

THE Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy last week agreed a number of measures aimed at tackling binge drinking, which will now be considered by the Council of Australian Governments.

Recommendations include changes to the existing Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code which would force mandatory pre-vetting of all alcohol advertising.

The ministers resolved to ask COAG to consider calling on industry to stop producing ready to drink (RTD) beverages combining alcohol with energy drinks, as well as reducing alcohol content in RTDs and ceasing the use of alcohol masking agents such as sweeteners in the products.

UK drug budget cut

THE British government has outlined a revised Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS) as part of its annual budget which was delivered last week.

The changes will see spending cut on branded pharmaceuticals, with a targeted £550m reduction slated for 2010-11 through a 3.9% reduction in prescription drug prices which became effective 01 Feb this year, and a further cut of 1.9% from 01 Feb 2010.

Diabetes approval

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration last week approved Janumet (sitagliptin/metformin) for the treatment of type 2 diabetes.

The medication is the world's first and only tablet combining a dipeptidyl peptidase-4 (DPP-4) inhibitor, sitagliptin, with metformin.

It's been approved as an adjunct to diet and exercise to improve glycaemic control in patients with type 2 diabetes inadequately controlled on metformin alone.

RGH E-Bulletin

THIS week's edition of the Repatriation General Hospital Pharmacy E-Bulletin gives an overview of the RespiMat Soft Mist inhaler, which uses mechanical power from a spring rather than propellants to provide metered doses of medication.

The inhaler is currently the subject of Phase 3 clinical trials in Australia; copies of the bulletin from chris.alderman@rgh.sa.gov.au.



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PBAC outcomes

THE full list of recommendations made by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee at its meeting last month has been published online at the PBS website.

There were 58 positive recommendations, ranging from newly approved medications and additional strengths through to additional indications for a number of existing products.

A number of the positive decisions were made for Section 100 (Highly Specialised Drug) listings, while there was also approval of a new regime for Wyeth Australia's Enbrel (etanercept) injection to allow for continuous treatment in the management of chronic plaque psoriasis.

There were eight "first time decisions not to recommend," including declining a request to amend the current Authority Required listing for smoking cessation product Champix (varenicline) by adding a note saying that a registration number for support and counselling programs is not required; and an additional criterion that a patient should have an appointment for a follow-up consultation.

Six items were the subject of subsequent decisions not to recommend, including Genzyme's Myozyme (alglucosidase), Merck Serono's Erbitux (cetuximab) (PD Fri), Alexion's Soliris (eculizumab), Nutricia Australia's Lanaflex, Solvay's Duodopa (levodopa with carbidopa monohydrate) and Abbott's Zemplar (paricalcitol).

Swine influenza warning

COMMUNITY pharmacies across Australia are likely to be in the front line of any local propagation of an outbreak of influenza which originated in Mexico but appears to have already spread to other parts of the world including New Zealand.

Cases have been confirmed in the USA, where the government overnight announced the release of a quarter of its stockpile of influenza medications including Tamiflu (oseltamivir) and Relenza (zanamivir), both of which have been shown to work against viral samples of the new strain.

The World Health Organisation has warned that human-to-human transmission of the virus is possible, with fears that it could develop into a global pandemic.

The virus is being described as a new subtype of A/H1N1 which hasn't previously been detected in either pigs or humans.

The Centers for Disease Control said treatment with the antivirals should commence within 48 hours of onset, but also said that 19 out of 20 US cases thus far confirmed

recovered without treatment.

Vaccine development targeting the new strain is under way but will take some months, the CDC said.

No cases have been reported in Australia at this stage, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is advising travellers who have visited Mexico recently to consult health professionals immediately if they develop flu-like symptoms.

Chief Medical Officer Jim Bishop has also written to GPs and hospitals around the country to alert them of the virus and its symptoms.

Mirixa minfos link

PHARMACY software vendor minfos says its system will provide a direct link with the Pharmacy Guild's Mirixa platform when it goes live in June this year.

Minfos manager Matt Lalor said some of the company's 650+ pharmacy clients across Australia would begin beta testing the Mirixa system in the coming weeks.

"We realise the importance of making the Mirixa system available and we have worked extensively to ensure the system will function seamlessly with the minfos software," he said.

The Mirixa Pro platform provides a basis for running a range of programs which can deliver targeted clinical services to patients, help manage medication use and improve compliance, promote safety and control costs.

Minfos is the latest vendor to confirm seamless integration with the Mirixa system.

More info 1800 657 993.

UK tobacco push

THE Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain has signed on to a campaign which is urging the banning of vending machine sales of cigarettes.

The proposals, which are part of legislation coming before the UK House of Lords this week, would also see tobacco products placed out of sight in shops.

"Smoking cessation is the most common enhanced service provided by pharmacies in England and Wales," the RSPGB said.



DISPENSARY CORNER

AN ENVIRONMENTALLY friendly hairdresser in China has set an important example in recycling by creating a detailed model of a Beijing landmark out of hair collected in his shop.

Huang Xin took more than five months and 11kg of hair to make the model of the Tiananmen Gate Tower which is almost 1m wide and 60cm high.

He said he only used women's hair because it was softer, washing and drying the offcuts before gluing it onto paper and rolling it into different shapes to make the scale model.

Huang said he also previously used human hair to make a model of Beijing's famous Bird's Nest Olympic stadium.

SCIENTISTS from Scotland's Glasgow University have created a special microchip which can automatically detect malaria.

Blood samples are placed onto the integrated circuit, which scans it and provides a diagnosis.

If malaria is confirmed, the chip also detect the strain of the disease meaning treatment can be optimised to target the specific condition being suffered.

The chip is being built into new diagnostic equipment which can greatly improve processing speed for suspected malaria samples.

THE health-giving benefits of a post-prandial siesta are being touted by the operator of a new 'catnap cafe' in the western Finland city of Turku.

Dubbed Naphouse, the cafe has been created by Jeremy Mast, who said "the idea came to me in a restaurant when I felt a bit sleepy after a meal."

Customers wanting a bit of a snooze are given slippers, a pillow, a blanket and an optional teddybear before they enter a special nap room, which has bean bags and mattresses on the floor.

The cafe also doubles as an art gallery and an activities workshop for indolent young people, and was built using funding from the EU's youth culture budget.

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