



Swine flu information

THE government has set up a special website for consumers and health professionals to find the latest info on the swine flu outbreak at www.healthemergency.gov.au.

Current measures include the declaration of swine influenza as a Quarantinable Disease, as well as border protection plans to delay the introduction of the virus into Australia.

Pilots on international flights must now report the health status of their passengers to the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service before landing, and thermal scanners have been dispatched to international airports ready for use if needed.

There's also a new Health Hotline available on 1802 007.

The World Health Organization overnight bowed to pressure from various quarters including meat producers, saying it would now refer to the flu as 'influenza A (H1N1)' rather than as swine flu.

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SHPA confirms clinical shift

THE Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia is calling on peak pharmacy organisations to "consider the services that are working in hospitals today and how they can be adapted to meet consumer needs broadly."

SHPA ceo Yvonne Allinson is the co-author of a workforce study published in the March *Journal of Pharmacy Practice and Research* which showed that pharmacists in hospitals spend most of their time on clinical pharmacy services for individual patients.

She said the ongoing shift to clinical pharmacy services had been taking place over the last 20 years, with this study showing that 47% of hospital pharmacists' time is spent outside the pharmacy department, working alongside other health professionals on such tasks as admission medication history interviews, medication management reviews and medication counselling.

15% of the time was devoted to management services that also improve patient safety such as prescribing policies, drug use evaluation and standardisation of

Bubble ball tickets

THE Asthma Foundation of Victoria says there are still tickets available for its annual gala charity event, The Bubble Ball, which will take place at Peninsula in Melbourne's Docklands precinct on 16 May.

This year's theme is 'Help Blow Asthma Away' and the event will include live entertainment, auctions and a fabulous meal - as well as demonstrating a "significant community effort to support the many Victorians living with asthma."

See www.bubbleball.com.au.

US Copaxone theft

THE US Food and Drug Administration has reported a theft of a large quantity of Copaxone (glatiramer acetate), which is used to treat multiple sclerosis.

About 14 pallets of the substance disappeared when the truck carrying them was stolen, with the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy warning that the drug may no longer be safe for use if stored improperly.

Teva has recalled the remainder of the same batch of Copaxone.

high risk medications, while the remaining 38% of time was used overseeing safe drug distribution services such as the specialised manufacture of medicines, involvement in clinical trials and appropriate labelling and packaging of medicines in the hospital.

Allinson said clinical pharmacy services in hospitals were positively linked with improved health outcomes, including lower mortality.

A US study has shown that lower death rates were associated with two staffing variables: the number of pharmacy administrators per 100 occupied beds, and the number of clinical pharmacists per 100 occupied beds.

She said these figures "reinforce the importance of what has been learned in Australia about the importance of services directed to both individual patient care, as well as towards a safer system."

MEANWHILE the workforce study also showed strong ongoing demand for hospital pharmacists - more information on **page two**.

Counterfeit alert

THE Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain has issued a warning to the public about the risks of buying counterfeit drugs for swine flu over the internet.

"We are concerned that unscrupulous people are exploiting the public's fears about swine flu by offering to sell the antiviral drugs Tamiflu and Relenza over the internet," said a spokesman.

"This is a golden opportunity for counterfeiters to offer fake supplies of these drugs. People can be at real risk if they buy medicines from unknown sources," he added.



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Methadone guidance

TWO US government departments have teamed in a new methadone education program, in response to an escalating number of poisoning deaths linked to the improper use of the medication.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration along with the Food and Drug Administration have launched *Follow Directions: How to Use Methadone Safely* to health care professionals, consumers and treatment clinics about the safe use of the drug for both pain relief and drug addiction treatment.

The number of poisoning deaths linked to methadone is rising faster than from any other narcotic drug, with these recent concerns primarily linked to overdoses when using the medication as an analgesic - see www.dpt.samhasa.gov/methadonesafety.

Hospital pharmacy demand

THE introduction of the PBS in Australia's public hospitals is one of the key factors driving strong demand for hospital pharmacists, with a new report confirming ongoing strong growth in the sector.

The *Journal of Pharmacy Practice and Research* workforce survey showed a 25% increase in hospital pharmacy positions between 2005 and 2007, with a predicted growth rate of 11% over the next two years.

President of the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia, Neil Keen, said the higher demand was also being driven by reforms linked to improved or extended clinical pharmacy services and pharmaceutical review initiatives.

"We know that clinical pharmacists reduce errors that may occur in medicine prescribing,

dispensing and administering systems in hospitals, as well as all steps of the medicines management pathway."

He said it was pleasing to see governments around the country recognising the essential nature of clinical pharmacy services, with increases in public hospital pharmacists announced in recent years by South Australia, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia.

Keen also hailed the creation of 64 new clinical pharmacy positions in NSW (*PD* 27 Mar) as a key outcome of the Garling Inquiry into the state's health system.

"Improvements in medication safety alone has the potential to reduce a patients' stay in hospital, saving money and freeing up beds for other patients," he said.



DISPENSARY CORNER

SPANISH scientists have made a major breakthrough for disabled people with the development of a wheelchair which can be controlled by the mind.

The UK *Daily Telegraph* reports that the chair scans its surrounds using a laser, creating a three dimensional picture of the area around it.

This image is then displayed on a screen, and the user (wearing an electrode-fitted skullcap to detect brain activity) simply concentrates on the part of the display where they want to go, with the chair then automatically responding.

The prototype currently takes about 30 seconds to process each movement, but the research team is now working on a faster and more sophisticated version.

THE swine influenza outbreak is threatening a national custom in Lebanon, where officials have warned the population to stop greeting each other with a kiss.

At a news conference this week to discuss the potential pandemic, Health Minister Mohammad Khalifeh gave a warning, saying: "If you visit someone, don't exchange kisses. Let's stop the social kissing habit."

It's customary for people in Lebanon to greet each other with three kisses to the cheek.

Presumably the snobbish habit of 'air kissing' is still OK, as long as they keep their distance.

A WART treatment has won an unwelcome award in the USA for a statement on its consumer medicines information.

The Wacky Warning Labels contest runs annually to highlight some of the more silly instructions provided with a range of products.

The wart treatment won for a statement in its documentation which was unlikely to reach its audience: "Do not use if you can't see clearly to read the information in this information booklet."

Other finalists included a personal satellite navigation system with the warning: "Do not eat the LCD panel."

Guild Insurance crosses the Tasman



EARLIER this year the Pharmacy Guild of Australia's fully owned subsidiary, Guild Insurance, launched its fledgling New Zealand office with a function on Monday 16 March at the Wellesley Club Lounge in Wellington.

The move followed the naming of Guild Insurance as the endorsed provider of pharmacy insurance for the NZ industry, with the new office co-located with the Guild at Pharmacy House in Wellington.

Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand ceo Annabel Young said "Guild's professionalism and their commitment to providing real service to members, influenced our decision to endorse their insurance services..

"We are confident that their arrival can benefit the

pharmacy profession and Wellington for a long time to come," she said.

Guild Insurance gm David Brown said the Wellington office would "focus on laying the foundations for Guild here, through excellent service profision and through demonstration of our considerable experience in pharmacy insurance.

"From this base we will look to pursue long term strategic growth in New Zealand," he added.

Pictured above are dignitaries at the launch of the new office, with NZ Pharmacy Guild President, Ian Johnson presenting a commemorative plaque to Brian Bengler, Guild managing director, to mark the occasion.