



The Pharmacy
Guild of Australia

This week's update from the Guild

Budget '09 sets scene for Agreement negotiations

NOW that the dust has settled on the Federal Budget, it is clear that while community pharmacy has fared reasonably well, the task ahead of us in negotiating the Fifth Agreement is immense.

To negotiate such an important Guild-Government agreement is a challenge in any fiscal environment, but to do it in a year when the deficit is nudging \$58 billion is far from ideal.

The pressure will be on to squeeze yet more savings out of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, and our task will be to highlight the savings and sacrifices already delivered by community pharmacy.

At the same time, we are heartened by some of the detail of last week's Budget to the extent that it reflects a recognition of community pharmacy as an important hub in our health care system.

We were particularly delighted to see the arrival of a long-awaited boost in the bulk handling fee for pharmacists who provide PBS medicines to remote Aboriginal communities.

The sharp increase in the section 100 fee, from \$1.14 to \$2.69 per script, was clearly justified in view of the fact that it had not been increased since its introduction in the late 1990s.

The Budget outcome stands as a symbol of the professionalism and patience of those pharmacists in remote Australia who continued providing the service for so long despite the fee freeze.

It also provides another example of the success of the Guild's preferred course in negotiations with the Government – persuasive advocacy, rather than strident attack.

77% have chronic conditions

THE majority of Australia's population has reported suffering one or more long-term medical conditions, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Health Survey 2007-08 released last week.

Although more than half (56%) of people aged 15 years and older rated their health as "very good or excellent", 77% also said they had conditions that had lasted or were expected to last over six months.

The most commonly reported long-term conditions were arthritis, reported by 15% of those surveyed, circulatory conditions such as high cholesterol (9%) or hypertensive disease (6%), asthma (10%), medically diagnosed mental health issues (11%) and diabetes (4%).

47% of the arthritis sufferers

Smoking ads can reduce cravings

AN Australian study has found that anti-smoking advertisements featuring negative images have the ability to help reduce tobacco cravings, but are not enough to make smokers quit.

The study was released at the Heart Foundation Conference in Sydney last week.

The study included smokers and ex-smokers aged 18-26, and measured their urge to smoke both before and after being shown an anti-smoking ad or an general audio-visual package.

"Results show the advertising led to a 16% decrease in cravings amongst smokers; ex-smokers experienced no change in cravings pre or post the test and smokers who did not see the advertisement experienced a 12% increase in cravings over the same period," said researcher Emily Kothe.

Emergency rego

THE Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain has been given the power to temporarily register "suitably experienced persons" as practising pharmacists on a temporary basis.

Legislative changes also allow the RPSGB to "annotate pharmacists' register entries on a temporary basis to give them additional prescribing rights during civil emergencies."

treated the condition with pharmaceuticals, while 1.3% used a complementary medicine.

For mental health conditions, 37.3% used medication while 8.2% used complementary treatments.

51% of those with circulatory ailments were being treated with medication, while 11% used complementary medicines.

The survey also revealed a decline in smoking rates, from 22% in 2001 to 19% in 2007/08.

Tech registration

AUTHORITIES in the UK have now passed a new law which will see pharmacy technicians there regulated from 01 Jul (PD 13 Mar).

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain will oversee the scheme in England, Scotland and Wales, with a spokesperson saying the move "reflects the growing role and responsibility of pharmacy technicians in delivering health services."

Registration will be compulsory but there will be a two year transition period, meaning people with relevant work experience or vocational qualifications will be able to register formally as pharmacy technicians until 30 Jun 2011, after which date specific qualification requirements for technicians will apply.

ADHD fish oil link

THE Royal Australian College of Physicians conference today will include a presentation of research into why ADHD symptoms in some children improve in response to specific doses of fatty acids derived from fish oil.

Two researchers from Goteborg University in Sweden will speak about their latest study which showed that children who respond to treatment with Omega3 showed corresponding changes in their plasma fatty acid profiles, which could provide a predictor of future responses to this type of treatment.

"The challenge is to identify why certain children with ADHD respond to specific formulations of Omega3 and Omega 6. And it may be that it is related to deficiencies that can be detected via blood tests," said one of the scientists, Dr Sven Ostlund.



DISPENSARY CORNER

RUSSIAN doctors are thrilled at the successful birth of a baby to a woman who weighs 250kg, or as Moscow newspaper *Pravda* put it, "a good quarter of a ton!"

The 34-year-old first time mum gave birth to a healthy boy after a five hour labour, with the potentially complex delivery overseen by Moscow's chief gynaecologist.

The newspaper said the woman's severe obesity would "normally preclude conception".

The infant weighed a more normal 2kg.

AVIAN flu may not be as big a threat as first thought, after researchers in Britain found that human noses are too cold for the virus to thrive.

A simulation of the nasal environment at Imperial College London has found that at 32°C avian flu viruses cannot spread - in contrast to the warmer 40°C internal temperature of birds.

The study found that human flu viruses are also affected by the colder temperatures found in the nose, but not to the same extent.

Both human and avian flu viruses thrived at human core body temperature of 37°C but in order to spread would need to also replicate in the nose, the researchers said.

AND speaking of flu pandemics, holiday resorts in Mexico are offering free vacations for three years to any tourist catching swine flu while there on holidays.

Negative publicity about the swine flu outbreak has shattered Mexico's tourism industry, with mass cancellations of bookings to places like Cancun and Cozumel which are among the world's top tourist destinations.

Officials have pointed out that the swine flu cases have been concentrated in major cities, with most coastal areas not even registering a single case.

"The 'flu-free guarantee' assures three years of free holidays to travellers who present flu symptoms eight days after returning from their trip," said a spokesman for one of the participating hotels.