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Tuesday 15th June 2010

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Guild Update

This week's update from the Guild Hepatitis C

Following on from 2010 National Hepatitis Awareness Week (17-24 May), the Pharmacy Guild of Australia has developed a community service announcement to air nationally throughout June.

The aim is to raise awareness that community pharmacy is a valuable source of information and advice on hepatitis C and is an environment that supports confidentiality and is free of stigma.

The television message says in part: "Over 200,000 Australians are living with hepatitis C. It can go undiagnosed without obvious symptoms for many years...blood to blood contact puts you at risk of having hepatitis C...Get tested. Get treated."

Community pharmacies are ideally placed to help promote awareness and offer support to people with hepatitis C, and to those who have yet to seek diagnosis, advice or treatment.

Increased treatment rates have the potential to lead to decreased mortality rates; improved quality of life with reduced transmission through prevention activities; and reduced prevalence of hepatitis C in the community.

These objectives are all in line with the recently endorsed Third National Hepatitis C Strategy 2010-2013.

Further information and resources relating to hepatitis can be found at Hepatitis Australia www.hepatitisaustralia.com.

This initiative was actioned through the Hepatitis C Public Health Promotion Pilot Program, funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing as part of the Fourth Community Pharmacy Agreement.

The program invited 320 pharmacies to participate from January – May 2010, targeting areas identified with a high prevalence of hepatitis C.

The key aim of the program was to raise awareness of the risk factors for transmission of hepatitis C and to assist in informing consumers that testing is a simple blood test at their GPs and there is treatment available.

New PI insurance standard

THE new national Pharmacy Board of Australia has published details of its proposed Professional Indemnity Insurance Registration Standard, which is set to become effective from 01 July as part of the new national registration scheme.

The standard has been released later than other parts of the proposed registration standards after the initial PI plan was rejected by the Ministerial Council, on the basis that a common approach by the National Boards of all the health professions should apply to the mandatory rego standards.

The board says it believes that the revised proposal "appropriately accommodates pharmacists in all practice settings, including pharmacists who practice exclusively in an employed position who would meet the standard by being indemnified by their employers".

The proposed standard also highlights the need for pharmacists to consider PI insurance arrangements separate from their employer in cases where they practice in locations other than their principal place of employment.

"Practice may or may not be remunerated and pharmacists who provide advice about medicines in situations not related to their employment arrangements must be indemnified and may require additional coverage to ensure compliance with the standard and the National Law," the board said.

Under the proposed PI standard, all registered pharmacists, including provisionally registered pharmacists, are required to maintain professional indemnity insurance cover of not less than \$20 million for any single claim.

Policies must include suitable 'run-off' cover once the pharmacist ceases to practice, and applicants for renewal of general registration must declare that they have not practised as a pharmacist during the previous year without all professional indemnity insurance requirements being met.

Gongs for pharmacists

TWO community pharmacists were among the Australians named in yesterday's Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Edgar Small, who runs Small's Pharmacy in Windsor, NSW was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the General Division (OAM) for service to pharmacy and to the community, after working in the area for 31 years including operating a dispensing service for private patients under the Hawkesbury District Health Service.

Small has been a member of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia between 1977-1997 and 1999-2008 and for 46 years has been a member of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia.

The other pharmacist named in the Honours List was Duncan Stewart from Yeppoon in Qld, who was also granted an OAM for service to the community of Yeppoon and pharmacy.

Stewart purchased his pharmacy in 1970 and continued to work through until 1998 including locum positions in the Rockhampton and Yeppoon Region.

He's was a Registered Pharmacist between 1962 and 1998 and continues to address service clubs such as Probus and Rotary on the history of pharmacy.

Aromababy winner

CONGRATULATIONS to Con

Kouskouris from Sigma Pharmaceuticals, who was the lucky winner of an Aromababy pack in Friday's *Pharmacy Daily*.

This week our competition is sponsored by Burt's Bees - see page two for your chance to win.

Malaysian boom

PHARMACIST numbers in Malaysia are forecast to triple over the next ten years to 22,000, according to the country's health minister, Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai.

He was speaking at the launch of the Jeffery Cheah School of Medicine and Health Sciences in Petaling Jaya, which is a joint venture with Victoria's Monash University which offers its pharmacy course there.

The minister said the number of new pharmacy graduates would grow by 1600 each year until 2020 with his department aiming to ensure the majority of the growth serviced rural areas of the country.



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Telmisartan response

BOEHRINGER Ingelheim has issued a statement strongly disagreeing with a paper published in *Lancet Oncology* this week which linked the use of angiotensin-receptor blockers (ARBs) with a "modestly" increased risk of cancer.

The US study considered evidence from nine trials and found about a 1% higher risk of cancer, urging regulators to investigate.

Boehringer Ingelheim said the positive safety profile of its ARB, Telmisartan, has been "confirmed in a market exposure of 34.5 million patient years."

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Staff ratios under scrutiny

UNION group APESMA has come out strongly in favour of pharmacy staffing ratios under a new guideline proposed by the Pharmacy Board of Australia.

According to the Pharmacists Division of APESMA (PDA) the Pharmacy Guild is seeking to have the guidelines deferred, despite similar arrangements having already been in place in Victoria for a number of years "without any impact on business viability".

Under the guideline, the pharmacist does not have to go 'back into the dispensary' to participate in the dispensing process; instead he or she can take the script from the consumer, check their history in the forward dispensing computer terminal and then pass it onto the dispensary technician for entry and assembly.

The pharmacist can then do the final check and counsel the patient. "What a treat to be able to dispense a script and actually have time to talk to the patient about their medication," said PDA President Geoff March.

"Consumers deserve to get value

for money for their taxes spent on prescription dispensing fees - they should expect to be counselled and offered a CMI by their pharmacist," he added.

In the past PDA has advocated linking dispensing fees to the number of scripts dispensed and having an adequate staff profile present to dispense that volume of prescriptions.

"Stressed, overworked pharmacists do not concentrate or do their job properly," March added, claiming that the proposed Pharmacy Board guidelines "will assist pharmacy owners meet their obligations to their patients AND to their staff".

Restless legs update

THIS week's edition of the RGH Pharmacy E-Bulletin gives an update on Restless Legs Syndrome and its association with some medical conditions and medications - auspharmlist.net.au/ebulletin.php.

MS recommendation

A US Food and Drug Administration advisory committee has voted unanimously in favour of approval for Novartis' FTY720 (fingolimod) as a treatment for relapsing remitting multiple sclerosis.

FTY720 is an oral treatment which, if given the final go-ahead, would be the first in a new class of MS therapy called sphingosine 1-phosphate receptor (S1PR) modulators which work by retaining certain immune cells in the lymph nodes, preventing them from reaching the central nervous system and causing damage.

The recommendation follows review of a two year study which showed that fingolimod significantly delayed disability progression.

New RACGP president

PROFESSOR Claire Jackson, who's head of general practice and primary care at the University of Queensland, will become the president of the Royal College of General Practitioners after the organisation's annual conference in Cairns during October.

Jackson was the only person who nominated for the role meaning an election wasn't necessary.



DISPENSARY CORNER

STAGNANT water from windscreen wipers may be the cause of up to 20% of UK cases of respiratory condition Legionnaires' Disease.

The British Health Protection Agency confirmed the finding after a report that professional drivers were more than five times more likely to get the infection.

The Legionella bacterium breeds in stagnant, warm water and when inhaled can lead to pneumonia, according to the study published in the *European Journal of Epidemiology*.

The research carried out in England's south-west found more cases of Legionnaires' Disease in those who drove or travelled in a van, those who drove through industrial areas and those who spent a lot of time in their car with the window open.

The Agency urged drivers to add screenwash to vehicle reservoirs to kill the bugs and save lives.

GROUNDBREAKING research in the US is set to reveal why ageing rocker Ozzy Osbourne is still alive after several decades of alcohol and drug abuse.

The 61-year-old, who headed up heavy metal group Black Sabbath, is famous for his slurred voice as well as an on-stage incident in which he needed a rabies injection after biting off the head of a live bat while heavily intoxicated.

He's now about to become one of just a few people in the world to have his full genome sequenced, with researchers saying that "sequencing and analysing individuals with extreme medical histories provides the greatest potential scientific value".

THERE'S been a massive boom in condom sales in South Korea, after the country's soccer team won their opening World Cup game against Greece on Saturday.

The *JoongAng Daily* said about a million fans packed the streets of Seoul after the win, buying five times as many condoms as during the last World Cup - along with lots of extra beer and snacks.

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