

Aussie hospitals

BETWEEN 2008-09 and 2009-10 Australian hospital admissions increased from 8.1m to 8.5m, with proportionately more entries to public hospitals over private ones.

The statistics were revealed in the latest AIHW *Australian hospital statistics 2009-10* report, which also found that in the five years to 2009-10 admissions to public hospitals rose by an average of 3.5% each year, while admissions to private hospitals increased by an average of 5% a year.

This increase coincided with a drop in the average length of overnight stays to 5.9 days in 2009-10, after being 6.2 days for the four previous years.

Interestingly the report also found that whilst admissions were on the rise, the waiting time for elective surgery only increased from a median of 34 days in 2008-09 to 36 days in 2009-10.

Weighty hip pocket

WEIGHT loss surgery for clinically obese Australians would pay for itself, according to a new report launched today at the Royal Australasia College of Surgeons Scientific Congress.

According to the report, which was compiled by a panel of health and economic experts, clinically obese people who undergo weight loss surgery can expect to recoup out-of-pocket surgery costs within around 3.5 years due to savings on medical visits, medications, the cost of related diseases, additional travel costs and additional expenditure associated with diets.

Calls for software standards

IT is essential that national standards for Australian general practice prescribing software are put in place, according to a call from NPS Australia yesterday.

National standards, according to NPS CEO, Lynn Weekes, would help to ensure a guaranteed minimum level of clinical functionality which clinicians could expect to find in any system, and would also safeguard quality and safety in prescribing.

"Given the widespread use of electronic prescribing systems in day-to-day practice, it's essential these systems meet key quality and safety criteria," said Weekes.

"At a minimum, general practice prescribing systems must support quality use of medicines and should be purposely designed and populated with decision support content which is independent, evidence-based, accurate, up-to-date and locally relevant," she added.

A NPS study published in 2008, compared seven common prescribing systems against a prioritised list of prescribing software features which were rated based on their impact on patient safety, quality of care, usefulness to the clinician and usefulness to the patient.

In most cases safety features such as alerts for same name patients, drug interactions, drugs in pregnancy and allergies were included in the systems.

Despite this however the NPS noted clinical decision support for prescribing was "highly variable, with little or no support for harmful

dosage regimens or for safety issues related to specific products".

In addition the NPS found that "no system provided access to information from either the Australian Medicines Handbook or Therapeutic Guidelines", and that many systems required practitioners to select medicine names from long lists of similar drug titles.

Following the study's release in 2008, most software vendors indicated to the NPS that they would make changes, however the NPS is now arguing that without national standards "gaps and inconsistencies" continue to exist within the programs.

"At the moment, there are major differences between systems in terms of what is considered important for quality and safety in prescribing," Weeks said.

"Government, professional bodies and the software industry all have a role to play in developing national standards to help ensure clinicians have the appropriate support structures in place when prescribing medicines," she added.

The Guild's PPI push

THE Pharmacy Guild of Australia is encouraging all Australian pharmacies who have not yet signed up for the Pharmacy Practice Incentives, funded under the Department of Health and Ageing, to enrol before the cut off of start-up PPI payments on 30 June - see page 3 for details.

Levothyroxine risks

A RECENT study published in the *British Medical Journal* has linked the use of levothyroxine in patients over 70 years old with a significantly increased risk of fracture, with a strong dose-response relation.

The study looked at 213,511 levothyroxine users aged over 70 years, and found that 10.4% of participants experienced a fracture in the 3.8 years post follow-up.

Among current users, high and medium cumulative doses (>0.093 mg/day and 0.044-0.093 mg/day) were associated with a significantly increased risk of fracture compared with low cumulative doses (<0.044 mg/day): 3.45 (3.27 to 3.65) and 2.62 (2.50 to 2.76), respectively.

WIN A U LITTLE BEAUTY PRIZE PACK



Pharmacy Daily has teamed up with U Little Beauty, and is giving away exciting prize packs every day this week.

U Little Beauty is a quintessentially Australian natural skincare range that delivers the goods - and looks great!

Every product is made and owned in Australia. Don't be fooled by this clever little Aussies whimsically named products - a bit of rough, butter me up, all washed up and skinny dip. This collection of natural skincare and body care is full of antioxidants, is SLS Free, Paraben Free, and Cruelty Free and is Vegan Certified.

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What ingredient is the world's richest source of Vitamin C?

Email your answer to: comp@pharmacydaily.com.au.

The first correct entry received will win!

Hint: Visit www.ulittlebeauty.com.au

Congratulations to yesterday's lucky winner: Sarah Mross from Caringbah South Pharmacy.



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Guild Update

This week's update from the Pharmacy Guild

PPI update

There are now 2500 community pharmacies registered for the Pharmacy Practice Incentives under the Fifth Agreement.

That's a pretty good outcome given that registrations only opened in March.

But it is still a couple of thousand pharmacies short of the target, which must be reached by 30 June this year.

All eligible pharmacies should register as soon as possible for to ensure they get the significant once-only start-up payments, worth around \$6500 for most pharmacies.

To be eligible, you must be a section 90 pharmacy, quality accredited (i.e. QCPP), and agree to comply with and display a service charter.

Registration is easy, and free! Go to www.5cpa.com.au to register and for more information.

There's also a phone number for general inquiries 1300 555 262.

The practice incentives are available for six priority areas: Dose Administration Aids (DAAs), clinical interventions, staged supply, primary health care, community service support and working with others.

The good news is that most quality accredited pharmacies are already providing the relevant services to a high standard, and will not have to make any significant changes to their work flows to be eligible.

They're a new way for pharmacies to be rewarded for their contribution to delivering quality services and improving health outcomes for patients.



The Pharmacy Guild of Australia

PSA seeking excellence

THE Pharmaceutical Society of Australia has today opened nominations for its annual Awards for Excellence.

Categories include Pharmacist of the Year, Young Pharmacist of the Year and the coveted Lifetime Achievement Award, with PSA President Warwick Plunkett saying they "represent the profession's pinnacles of achievement".

The awards are once again being sponsored by Symbion Pharmacy Services, marking the seventh consecutive year of Symbion's support.

Symbion CEO Patrick Davies said the awards "inspire pharmacists at

all levels and in all sectors of the profession to continue to lift standards even higher".

He said this meant that the quality of health care in Australian pharmacies was "second to none".

"These awards highlight what is great about our profession as well as showcasing the outstanding work being done by individuals within the profession," he added.

Nomination forms for the awards are available on the PSA website or from nicole.campbell@psa.org.au.

Guild life membership

PHARMACY Guild of Australia members who have been with the organisation for over 50 years may be eligible to become a 50 Year Life Member.

The Queensland Guild is calling on all pharmacists who think they may be eligible to provide it with: details of pharmacies they have owned in the past; when the pharmacies were bought and sold; and the date they joined the Guild.

As a 50 Year Member pharmacists are entitled to free annual proprietor membership, one premise membership at no cost and peer recognition.

If you believe you are eligible email tish.stone@qldguild.org.au.

Diabetes drug approval

A NEW drug for the treatment of blood glucose control in adults with type 2 diabetes, Tradjenta (linagliptin), has been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration.

Tradjenta is marketed by Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals and prior to approval was proven safe and effective in eight double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical studies involving about 3,800 patients with Type 2 diabetes.

The drug (taken in tablet form) works by increasing the level of hormones that stimulate the release of insulin after a meal by blocking the enzyme dipeptidyl peptidase-4 or DPP-4, which leads to better blood glucose control.

Bowel screening funds

HEALTH Minister Nicola Roxon has strongly hinted that this month's Federal Budget will include four years of funding for national bowel screening.

In an interview on ABC Radio this morning Roxon suggested that the government had decided the \$100m cost of the program was a better use of taxpayer money than funding new drugs on the PBS.

Stem cells returning?

EMBRYONIC stem cell research may be back on the table in the US, following the overturning of an earlier federal funding blocking order by a US appeals court.

US federal funding for embryonic stem cell research was granted by President Obama in 2009 after he reversed earlier prohibitions - however his decision was put on hold by an injunction whilst a court battle brought about by opponents of embryonic stem cell research played out.

The latest ruling says the wording of a federal law about use of embryos does not apply to past actions, and therefore allows funding of research involving embryonic stem cells.

Some in the medical community have lauded the decision as a victory for the development of new drugs and treatments.

DISPENSARY CORNER

AUSSIES heat up competition.

An Australian company is hoping to take the title for the world's hottest chilli for its tiny 2.5cm mega-pepper, the Trinidad Scorpion Butch T.

The chilli measures 1.46-million Scoville Heat Units - compared to a jalapeno pepper which contains between 2,500-8,000 SHUs - and requires workers to wear chemical masks and protective clothing to avoid the fumes when mincing it for sauces.

The current record holder, the Naga Viper British Chilli, sits at 1.30 million SHU.

"I had hallucinations, I had to lie down, I couldn't walk for 20 minutes, dizzy," said one of the chilli's developers, Marcel de Wit. "This chilli was so severe... I will never, ever do it again, I can tell you that," he added.

GOOD sporting genes.

An 18-month old Dutch toddler, Baerke van der Meij, will need to wait until he has full mastery of his speaking skills to thank his father and grandfather for helping him to score a 10 year contract with local soccer club, VV Venlo.

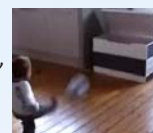
According to reports, Baerke was nabbed by the club after it viewed a clip of him repeatedly kicking a soccer ball into a toy box.

The clip, posted on YouTube by his proud father, has so far attracted around 150,000 views.

In a twist of fate, it turns out that Baerke's grandfather passed the soccer genes down to the toddler, having himself played for VV Venlo.

A spokesperson for the club joked with local media that "The toddler's favourite position has not yet been determined".

"But we can speak of a right-footed player with a very good kicking technique, perseverance and, importantly, football genes via his grandfather," the spokesperson added.



Baerke bends it like Beckham

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