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## Tassie health report

**THIS** week sees the release of the first report by the Commission on Delivery of Health Services in Tasmania which outlines early opportunities for structural and system improvement across the state's health system, highlights suggestions raised by the community and sets the direction for the Commission in 2013.

Key recommendations of the report include: improving health services for patients by ensuring front line services are provided as efficiently as possible; improving the management of elective surgery to reduce waiting lists for patients; and improving the coordination and effectiveness of hospital and health service management.

The report also recommends supporting doctors, nurses and other health care providers with improved information and communication technology.

"This preliminary report is a first step towards improving access to health care for Tasmanian patients," said Health Minister Tanya Plibersek.

"It lays the foundations for future work on redesigning Tasmania's health system to ensure Tasmanian patients receive the right treatment in the most appropriate setting," she added.

## Defending originator brands

**MEDICINES** Australia has gone on the attack over claims made by the Generic Medicines Industry Association (GMiA) that preferencing generic drugs over originator brands would provide the Government with savings, saying there is no evidence to back that claim.

"Policy makers should consider any proposed changes to the PBS and their costings with great care, as history shows that ad hoc, piecemeal changes to the PBS have ended up being bad for industry, government and patients," said Medicines Australia Chief Executive Dr Brendan Shaw.

"There is nothing new here.

"Many of the proposals being advanced today have been around for years, have been considered and have been rejected on good policy grounds.

"Proposals to privilege one group of manufacturers at the expense of another group of manufacturers would distort the medicines market, would undermine the principles of the PBS, would limit doctor and patient choice, and would likely not drive any savings for the Government," he added.

Shaw backed his position by

saying that the "hard evidence" shows that the current price disclosure system for the PBS, developed by current and former governments, in partnership with the industry, has reduced the price the Government pays for generic medicines and their branded equivalents by as much as 80%.

"If we need a policy discussion on future management of the PBS, then consultation and consideration will better serve that discussion," he said.

## Passport solutions

**BRANDS** Australia is rolling out a complete range of passport imaging solutions including: three passport photo systems; the Polaroid Business in a Box, Digital Business in a Box, and Biometrics Business in a Box.

The systems feature ICAO Biometrics Software Technology which run the photos through over 30 specification tests to determine if the photo will be suitable for a passport before the photos are printed, and a compliance certificate can also be printed off and submitted with passports to reduce photo rejections.

See [www.brandsaustralia.com](http://www.brandsaustralia.com).

## Mutation testing

A **NEW** study on mutation testing in lung cancer highlights the advantages of multi-gene testing to provide patients with effective personalised medicine, according to The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA).

The study, conducted by RCPA spokesperson Professor Sandra O'Toole, looked in detail, at early stage lung adenocarcinoma before it has spread to lymph nodes or the rest of the body, and found that early cancer is often different to advanced cancer in its genetic makeup and should be tested and treated accordingly.

"What we do with mutation testing is look for the specific gene or genes that the cancer relies on and use targeted treatments to shut them down," Professor O'Toole said.

## Fosamax off PBS

**MSD'S** Fosamax Once Weekly is set to be scrapped from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme from 01 May 2013.

The company's Fosamax Plus will however remain on the list, as will several generic versions of alendronate including Adronat, Fonat and Ossmax.

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## Early rego closing

EARLY registration for the Heart Foundation's conference: Prevention of cardiovascular disease: translating evidence into practice, is closing on 08 March.

Set to be held at the Adelaide Convention Centre, 16-18 May 2013, the conference will hear from speakers including Dr Steven Nissen, Dr Christine Albert, Professor Ian Meredith and Professor Stephen Nicholls.

See [heartfoundation.org.au/conference](http://heartfoundation.org.au/conference).

## Vitamin D awareness

KERRI-Anne Kennerley has signed up to raise awareness of osteoporosis and Vitamin D deficiency in Australia.

Often labelled as the 'silent disease', osteoporosis is a debilitating bone disease causing the bones to become more brittle, and increasing the risk of fractures and breaks.

"Given my family history, I was well aware of the risk factors and the importance of sun exposure in preventing vitamin D deficiency, yet genuinely thought I was doing enough to remain healthy," Kerry-Anne said.

"What I did not realise was that my commitment to sun safety was actually preventing me from obtaining the adequate - and safe - levels of UV exposure required for optimal vitamin D and overall health," she added.

According to the first national study of Australian adults over the age of 25, vitamin D deficiency affects nearly one third of Australians.

## Illness in regional retirees

AUSTRALIANS living outside major cities are more likely to be fully retired due to ill-health than people in major cities, according to a new Sydney University study.

The study analysed self-reported data of 21,719 women and 16,393 men from the Sax Institute's *45 and Up Study* of people aged 45 to 65 with common statistical characteristics living in NSW.

During the study, researchers investigated which of a wide range of health problems are more likely to be associated with full and partial early retirement.

According to the research, men and women of working age, living in regional areas are more likely to be fully retired because of ill health than their city counterparts.

Looking at the breakdown researchers noted that men from outer regional areas were more likely to be partially retired due to ill-health than their city counterparts.

Meanwhile, the proportion of working aged men fully retired due to ill-health in cities is five percent, eight percent for inner regional areas and 9 for outer regional areas.

For fully retired working aged women the percentages were four percent for the city, five percent for inner regional and six percent for outer regional areas.

Interestingly, researchers noted that the largest association with early retirement due to ill-health for men and women was stroke, followed by 'other' cancers (cancers other than melanoma, skin and breast cancer).

"Retirement is influenced by a multitude of factors of which health is one," said lead author Dr Sabrina Pit, from the Centre for Rural Health, School of Public Health, at the University of Sydney.

"While delaying retirement is not always in the best interest of those suffering illness, or their employers, we need to find better ways to keep people with health problems in the workforce.

"Our research could inform health policies for mature-age workers aimed at reducing early retirement.

"Government spending on pensions and disability payments could be reduced by putting in place more programs that specifically address health problems leading to early retirement," Dr Pit added.

## HBO is useless for feet?

A US study has found that the use of hyperbaric oxygen (HBO) to treat foot ulcers may be useless.

The cohort study compared the effectiveness of HBO with other conventional therapies for the treatment of a diabetic foot ulcer and prevention of lower extremity amputation, and involved 6,259 individuals with diabetes, adequate lower limb arterial perfusion, and foot ulcers.

The researchers found that HBO neither improved the likelihood that a wound would heal nor prevented amputation, and suggested that the usefulness of HBO in the treatment of diabetic foot ulcers needs to be reevaluated.



## DISPENSARY CORNER

NOT tired.

A ten-year-old boy, Dan Davis, in the US state of Massachusetts tried to enlist the help of emergency services to get his bed curfew extended.

According to reports, Dan called the US emergency phone number 911 just after 8pm to report his mother for trying to make him go to bed when he simply was not tired.

Dan however got a case of shyness when the emergency operator answered the call and immediately hung up the phone.

Following emergency protocol, the local police station called Dan's house back.

Answering the call Dan's mother Shayayne Rosario explained that her son must have followed through on his threat to call the police on her because he wanted a late night.

"Dan, would you like to talk to the police?" Rosario is heard saying on the return call.

"Because you can't be calling 911 when there is no emergency," she added.

In addition to returning the call, protocol insists that the police also visit the house where the call originates and when they arrived at the Davis residence they were showed into Dan's room for a chat with him about the seriousness of 911.

Fortunately for Dan he is facing no legal ramifications for the action, but is however grounded for two weeks.

APP2013  
21-24 March



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### Guild Update

#### Medicare Locals

Medicare Locals are fostering new working partnerships between community pharmacies and general practices - all aimed at delivering better quality health care for patients.

Australia's primary health care sector has been reformed through the development of 61 Medicare Locals across Australia.

Medicare Locals are regional primary care organisations connecting health services locally as well as identifying and addressing local health service gaps.

At this year's Australian Pharmacy Professional 2013 conference (APP), the Australian Medicare Local Alliance (AML Alliance) and the Pharmacy Guild (The Guild) will showcase how general practice and community pharmacy are working together effectively at the local level.

A session on Medicare Locals and pharmacy, on Thursday afternoon 21 March, will discuss current innovations in community pharmacy that offer opportunities for Medicare Locals for improved patient care.

It will also canvass the mechanisms for Medicare Locals to connect with community pharmacy.

Panel members consisting of prominent speakers involved in the Medicare Local landscape will comment on:

- The role of Medicare Locals, membership models and the benefits of being a member
- How community pharmacists are/can be involved with Medicare Locals
- Models of community pharmacy engagement including innovative models of care using community pharmacy

As part of the session, delegates will have the opportunity to ask questions of the panel about Medicare Locals and community pharmacy's role, as well as identifying any innovative care occurring in their region featuring community pharmacists and other health care professionals.

APP 2013 takes place at the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre from 21-24 March.



The Pharmacy  
Guild of Australia

## Nerve pain in Australians

**ONE** in five Australians living with nerve pain and their partners say their relationship has suffered due to their pain, according to the *Pfizer Nerve Pain and Relationships Report*.

Neuropathic pain, also known as nerve pain, is pain arising from a lesion or disease affecting the somatosensory system, and is often described as stabbing, electric shock like, shooting, burning or coldness, "pins and needles", numbness or itching.

Nerve pain can be caused by direct damage to nerves due to an injury or following an operation, or can be a relatively common complication of other medical conditions such as shingles or diabetes.

The report coincides with the listing of Lyrica (pregabalin) on the PBS from Friday for the management of neuropathic pain,

and was conducted and prepared by IMS Health who carried out a survey of 1,031 Australians, 539 were people with pain, 292 were partners of people with pain and 201 were close family members of people with pain.

The data was gathered between 13 and 26 November 2012.

According to the report findings nearly half of sufferers said that their pain contributed to the end of a relationship (46%), while four in ten admitted that their pain prevents them from going out and meeting new people.

In addition, seven in ten (69%) people living with neuropathic pain said that they suffer from sleep problems or interrupted sleep, whilst nearly a third (30%) of respondents said that neuropathic pain prevents intimacy between partners.



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*What kind of make-up product is UV Silk Shield Foundation?*

Congratulations to yesterday's lucky winner, Ghazal Ghodosi of Choice Pharmacy Townsville.

### Acupuncture for SAR

**ACUPUNCTURE** may improve the quality of life for sufferers of seasonal allergic rhinitis, according to a new German study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

The study looked at 46 specialised physicians in 6 hospital clinics and 32 private outpatient clinics, and enrolled 422 individuals with seasonal allergic rhinitis and sensitisation to birch and grass pollen.

According to the result acupuncture led to "statistically significant improvements in disease-specific quality of life and antihistamine use measures after 8 weeks of treatment compared with sham acupuncture (needle acupuncture using points that are thought not to be relevant to seasonal allergic rhinitis) and with rescue medication alone, but the improvements may not be clinically significant".