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TGA conference dates

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has detailed the conferences at which it will be a participant or presenter in an online calendar of events.

The portal clarifies for whom the courses are relevant, a course overview, entry criteria for each event and registration information including fees - **CLICK HERE**.

Vit D supps urged

SUPPLEMENT rather than test is the message GPs are getting from a recent article published in the *MJA* encouraging a proactive vitamin D supplementation program for patients perceived to be at risk.

Australian National University's College of Medicine epidemiologist Professor Robyn Lucas said, "The [obvious question is], if you know your patient is at risk — sits in an office all day, or has other risk factors — why test them? Why not just supplement them?"

Lucas was commenting on a short report by Dr Steven Boyages from the Western Sydney Local Health District published in the *MJA* quantifying the dollar savings at \$42m due to reduced testing for vitamin D deficiency.

CLICK HERE for the report.

Panadol Osteo patient push

CHRONIC pain patient group Painaustralia has written to health minister Sussan Ley urging her to reconsider the removal of Panadol Osteo from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

The controversial move has been widely criticised, with the Pharmacy Guild last week (*PD* 12 Jan) claiming the delisting was a mistake because the normal PBS prescription for the analgesic is two packs per month, whereas the decision was based on the price of a single pack.

In this latest development Painaustralia ceo Lesley Brydon cites concerns that patients might seek alternative PBS-subsidised therapies with poorer safety profiles than Panadol Osteo, such as NSAIDs or opioids.

"Such a move by patients would clearly add to the complexity of their condition and negate any potential cost savings to government and the consumer," Brydon said.

"Painaustralia is also concerned about the increased costs for patients arising from the delisting of Panadol Osteo, which is currently the recommended first line treatment for people suffering pain

secondary to osteo-arthritis."

Prior to the delisting concessional patients paid \$7.52 per month for two packs of Panadol Osteo, but since 01 Jan the price has now increased to \$14 monthly and on top of this the purchases no longer contribute to the patient's Safety Net "and that means an added financial burden.

"We can expect even higher prices in the near future as a result of the forecast price increase by the medicine's manufacturer," the Painaustralia chief added.

Brydon said her organisation is backing recommendations by other groups such as Arthritis Australia and the Australian Rheumatology Association that the delisting of Panadol Osteo be reconsidered, pending a "formal review of the clinical practice guidelines for its use in osteoarthritis and consideration given to how other effective management strategies can be adopted".

Indigenous drug risks

THE Medical Journal of Australia has released an article highlighting concerns about therapeutic drug safety for Indigenous Australians.

It notes that drug development programs often don't include Indigenous Australians and few randomised control trials have been performed in this population.

"Attention is given to reporting the safety of medications in older people and paediatric populations, and in pregnant and breastfeeding women. However, in Australia, there are no specific reporting requirements for ethnic groups, including Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders," says the article.

It concludes that the lack of a robust evidence base means "the potential for harm is real."

APC goes digital

EFFECTIVE 01 Feb the Australian Pharmacy Council said it will no longer accept paper-based applications for Skills Assessment.

Assessment applications must use the online system, first ensuring eligibility in the online eligibility check, then going to the online portal to upload documents and pay directly.

CLICK HERE for the online portal.

GSK Boostrix supply

RESEARCH-BASED pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) has confirmed



it will prioritise whooping cough vaccine availability for those most at risk of the disease and will ensure uninterrupted supply of Boostrix to all Australian State, Territory and Federal Government vaccination programs where Boostrix is the vaccine of choice.

Boostrix is a combined diphtheria-tetanus-acellular pertussis (whooping cough) (dTpa) vaccine.

For more information, the company has a med info line on 1800 033 109.

PBS education

THE federal department of Human Services has launched online education resources which allow health professionals to refresh their knowledge of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

The interactive eLearning programs provide "accurate and up-to-date information on key issues" including prescribing, dispensing and claiming requirements, with the resources available to newly registered and experienced pharmacists.

See humanservices.gov.au.

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Expired drug warning

THE FDA has issued a statement reminding consumers not to expired medications.

They explain such drugs can be less effective or even risky due to a change in chemical composition or a decrease in strength.

Guild Update

Digest confirms community pharmacies under pressure

THE release of the 2015 Guild Digest has confirmed the tough trading conditions being faced by Australia's 5,500 community pharmacies.

The 2015 Digest, the 43rd edition, presents a snapshot of pharmacy operations in Australia for the financial year 2013-2014, based on a sample of 436 pharmacies.

There have been significant changes in the operating landscape of pharmacies over the past 10 years due to growing regulatory and competitive pressure, including major reforms of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. The Digest confirms a substantial reduction in revenue since 2010 linked to the PBS reforms.

Compared with the previous year, 2013-2014 results show a downward trend in overall sales by 1.79 per cent, with gross margin down by 0.9 per cent.

The Digest also reveals that around 16 per cent of pharmacies are located in rural areas, and there was one pharmacy for every 4,305 Australians in 2014.

On average, each community pharmacy is open 62.7 hours a week, and is open for an average of 10 hours a day during the week.

Members can log into the Guild website to read the 2015 Guild Digest under the Business Support tab.

Pharmacists key for kidneys

PHARMACISTS who screened at-risk patients for chronic kidney disease (CKD) discovered previously unrecognised disease in more than 15% of patients tested, according to a study published this month in the *Canadian Pharmacists Journal*.

The research is claimed to be one of the first studies to provide "concrete evidence of the benefits of allowing community pharmacists to order laboratory tests and see patients' test results," according to author Yazid Al Hamarneh.

720 patients were enrolled in the study, which tested an online decision-making tool called the "CKD Pathway" to help primary care providers to decide which patients to test and give appropriate lifestyle advice, medication or referral.

55 community pharmacies across the province of Alberta took part in the project, identifying patients at risk of CKD based on recent prescriptions and lab test results.

Those with high risk factors were sent for blood and urine tests for kidney function, unless they had been tested in the previous year.

Of the 720 patients screened, 39% had CKD, and of those a whopping

40% had no record or knowledge of a previous CKD diagnosis.

Pharmacists were able to play a role in the detection because in Alberta they have been able to order, interpret and view laboratory tests since 2012, with the CKD trial said to have "important implications for chronic disease prevention and management".

CLICK HERE to view the study.

AstraZeneca buy

ASTRAZENECA overnight announced an agreement for the acquisition of a 55% stake in Netherlands-founded biotech Acerta Pharma.

The US\$4 billion deal includes an upfront payment \$2.5 billion and a further \$1.5 billion when the company's cancer drug acalabrutinib is approved in the US.

There is also an option for AZ to purchase the remaining 45% of Acerta for US\$3 billion, with AstraZeneca ceo Pascal Soriot saying the deal is "consistent with our focus on long term growth and reflects the role targeted business development plays in our business model".



DRUG traffickers need to be creative these days and as we know, boogie board covers just aren't inconspicuous enough to get marijuana over international borders anymore.

Enter carrots. These drug smugglers thought outside the box, attempting to hide more than 1,100 kilograms of marijuana inside a fictitious carrot shipment from Mexico to the US.

The orange packages stuffed with weed and wrapped to resemble large carrots were hidden in bags of actual carrots by the criminals.

It might have looked innocent enough, but the sniffer dogs couldn't be fooled during a search near the US border with Mexico in southeastern Texas.



HAVE you ever done a spot of online shopping only to receive the wrong package in the post?

Well, there's a guy in Bristol who knows a thing or two about that: He ordered a Kindle ebook reader and got sent a patient's tumour sample instead.

The package which ended up on James Potten's doorstep was intended for the Royal Free Hospital in London.

James didn't open the sealed box which said "patient tissue" and FedEx has apologised and picked up the tumour sample. He's still waiting on the Kindle.

"I don't know where my Kindle is, but if it is at the Royal Free I'd be happy to do an exchange," James said.

Win with MILANI

This week *Pharmacy Daily* and Milani are giving away everyday a prize pack including Transparent Anti-Feathering Lipliner, Tuscan Toast Matte Lipstick and Venice Fierce Foil Eyeshine.

Milani Cosmetics is a cruelty-free brand. They do not test products on animals, nor do they allow others to test on their behalf. The brand is certified by both PETA and The Leaping Bunny Program (CCIC) as cruelty-free. Milani also has a ton of Vegan options also. For more info visit www.milanicosmetics.com.au

To win, be the first from QLD to send the right answer to the following question to comp@pharmacydaily.com.au

How many different Fierce Foil Eyeshines are there?

Congratulations to yesterday's winner, Kathleen Moorby from the Pharmacy Guild of Australia.



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