



Imbruvica funded

JANSSEN'S leukaemia and lymphoma breakthrough drug Imbruvica (ibrutinib) is to be added to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), effective Dec this year, at a cost of \$460m, slashing the cost of therapy from an average of \$187,390 to \$38.80 per script.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said that this "life-changing treatment" had been beyond the reach of most patients but "that will now all change."

Ibrutinib is indicated for chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL), the most common form of leukaemia affecting around 1,500 Australians every year, and small lymphocytic lymphoma (SLL) patients who haven't responded to first-line chemotherapy.

Public health costs up

GOVERNMENT funding for health has risen, with individuals now funding a smaller proportion of health costs, according to a report released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

The report, 'Health expenditure Australia 2015-16', shows that \$170.4b was spent on health goods and services in 2015-16, with \$114.6b (67.3%) of this funded by governments, up from 66.9% in the prior year.

"Individuals contributed 17.3% to overall health spending, down from 17.7% a year earlier, which makes it the smallest contribution by individuals since 2011-12," AIHW spokesperson Vicki Bennett said.

Go to aihw.gov.au for the report.

States urge Hunt on codeine

A JOINT letter from most of Australia's state and territory health ministers to Federal counterpart Greg Hunt has urged him to "manage the concerns" of stakeholders affected by the upcoming rescheduling of codeine to prescription-only.

All states except SA were signatories, but rather than seeking to overturn the TGA's decision, it instead requests that Hunt consider alternative approaches reflecting the size and diversity of Australia.

"There is concern that some people managing chronic conditions with codeine medications will deteriorate as they abandon medication due to the out-of-pocket costs associated with accessing GPs for their prescription," the letter states.

"All jurisdictions are committed to reducing the impact of inappropriate medication use, addiction and overdoses of all kinds, and are taking a range of actions in support of this policy goal...however some stakeholders have raised a number of concerns about the unintended consequences of the change in scheduling of codeine products."

The letter urges Hunt to address the matter at a federal level "to prevent variation in prescribing and dispensing practices".

The Guild's campaign on codeine garnered support last week from NSW deputy premier John Barilaro (PD Fri), who backed the proposal to allow patients to access the drug without prescription in certain circumstances, including the use of

a real-time monitoring system.

The joint letter relays concerns including that the impact of the up-scheduling "will be felt particularly acutely in rural and regional areas where access to GPs is already low".

The Guild commended the state and territory health ministers for their letter, saying they were "justifiably concerned that the up-scheduling will clog up doctors' practices and emergency patients, leaving patients with temporary acute pain such as headache, toothache and menstrual pain without timely access to treatment."

MEANWHILE the Guild has also blasted the Australian Medical Association which last week issued a statement accusing the Guild of wanting to undermine the TGA rescheduling decision on codeine.

"It is time for the AMA to get real on codeine...accept that doctor shopping is rife, and acknowledge that patients using codeine medicines safely and appropriately should be able to continue to do so with safeguards and real time recording in place," the Guild said.

Antizol AusPAR

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration has posted its Australian Public Assessment Report (AusPAR) for AFT Pharmaceuticals' Antizol (fomepizole).

Antizol is approved as a new chemical entity indicated for the treatment of ethylene glycol or methanol poisoning.

Visit tga.gov.au to access.

Tambassis flags new GuildLink app

PHARMACY Guild national president George Tambassis has confirmed that the Guild's technology offshoot GuildLink is about to launch a new app.

Dubbed My Pharmacy Link, the smartphone app will "enable patients and carers to look after their pharmacy related needs and have their medicines information at their fingertips, along with reminders and vital signs".

Tambassis spoke about the development at the 7th International Carers Conference in Adelaide last week, during a Guild-sponsored dinner at the event.

Other key pharmacy-related advancements to help carers highlighted by Tambassis included the trialling of wireless enabled dose administration aids that transmit signals to carers about whether a medication has been taken or not.

Gentamycin recall

PFIZER Australia, in consultation with the TGA, is recalling 10 batches of Gentamicin Injection BP 80 mg in 2 mL Steriluer ampoules in packs of 10 and 50.

Affected batches may contain higher than expected amounts of histamine which has the potential to induce signs and symptoms of hypersensitivity reactions, including anaphylaxis, especially where patients have severe kidney impairment.

Affected batch numbers and expiry dates are listed at tga.gov.au.

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Dispensary Corner

A MEDICAL incident of the veterinarian kind has seen a whopping 25 tennis balls removed from the stomach of a dog.

The seven-year-old doberman from Sunderland in the UK, named Stella, was taken to the vet when her owner noticed she was not eating with her characteristic appetite.

An operation ensued and the surgeon found her stomach contained enough balls for a tennis tournament.

Most had been chewed, but amazingly one had even been swallowed whole.

Stella's owner said she was recovering well, adding "she's bounced back quite quickly".



EMERGENCY workers evacuated a school in the USA last week, after a strange smell led to hazmat crews being called.

Students and teachers at the Cristo Rey Jesuit High School reported the unusual odour, and in a "better safe than sorry" approach issued an alert.

After an investigation the crews discovered that the source of the smell was in fact a "pumpkin spice" flavoured air freshener which had been placed near an air conditioning intake.

Pumpkin Spice is a popular fragrance around this time of year in the lead-up to Halloween.

NZ wins measles war

NEW Zealand has won international praise for successfully eliminating endemic measles and rubella for the first time.

No cases have originated in NZ for the last three years, with the World Health Organization confirming elimination of the dangerous childhood diseases in the country.

However people who have caught measles or rubella overseas "regularly bring them in on their arrival here," said NZ director of public health, Caroline McElroy.

"We must remain vigilant and improve our vaccination rates because these diseases can easily spread among unimmunised people from imported cases," she said.

Snoring remedy tick

THE US Food and Drug Administration has approved a new treatment for patients diagnosed with moderate to severe central sleep apnoea.

The Remedē System is an implantable device that stimulates a chest nerve that is responsible for sending signals to the diaphragm to stimulate breathing.

Drug Action Teams

THE Federal Government has announced ongoing funding to support a further 40 Local Drug Action Teams rolling out across the country to tackle drug use and harm, bringing to 80 the total number funded.

The initiative is part of a \$298 million investment over four years to combat illicit drug and alcohol use through the National Ice Action Strategy - more info at adf.org.au.

New NSAID for eyes

NPS' Australian Prescriber has provided a brief summary of the role of newly approved Ilevro (nepafenac), by Novartis, for prevention and treatment of pain and inflammation associated with cataract surgery.

After administration, nepafenac penetrates the cornea and is rapidly metabolised to amfenac by hydrolases, the article explains.

Nepafenac and amfenac work by potentially inhibiting cyclo-oxygenase (COX) 1 and 2 enzymes.

Dosing is one drop per day for 15 days starting the day prior to surgery - go to nps.org.au for more.



Weekly Comment

Welcome to **PD's** weekly comment feature.

This week's contributor is Professor Sarah Hosking, CEO National Breast Cancer Foundation.



NBCF funding breast cancer research since 1994

THE National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF) has awarded more than \$140 million to over 470 Australian-based research projects since 1994. The funds raised entirely by the Australian community has helped develop a greater understanding for breast cancer and open doors to better treatments for people living with the disease.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the Pink Ribbon Breakfast campaign and I urge the Australian community to come together once again to host a Pink Ribbon Breakfast to raise funds for continuous research towards our goal of zero deaths of the devastating disease by 2030.

Funds raised from the campaign will go towards research that will have the biggest impact and save lives. This includes metastatic breast cancer, which is the main cause of death from breast cancer.

Register to host a Pink Ribbon Breakfast at www.pinkribbonbreakfast.org.au.

WIN WITH PLAQUEAWAY

Each day this week, Pharmacy Daily and PlaqueAway are giving away one bottle of PlaqueAway capsules valued at \$37.95.

PlaqueAway is a new and unique food supplement in Australia with significant oral health benefits. The capsules contain organic *Ascophyllum nodosum* (seaweed) powder which reduces plaque and tartar on teeth. Oral health benefits include a reduction in bad breath. As plaque is often stained, teeth will be whiter.

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