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EMA consults on antibiotics

THE European Medicines Agency has announced a public hearing into quinolone and fluoroquinolone antibiotics, giving a “voice to patients, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, researchers and everyone else” who wants to share their experience with using the medications.

Quinolones and fluoroquinolones are widely prescribed in the European Union, and the hearing is part of a review being carried out by EMA’s Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee which is investigating reports of “serious persistent side effects” mainly affecting muscles, joints and the nervous system.

Some of the effects have been reported in patients with infections that were not severe and could have been treated with other antibiotics, the EMA said.

The session will take place at the agency’s current London premises on 13 Jun 208 - ec.europa.eu.

New Zealand OTC codeine ban

NEW Zealand’s Medsafe regulator is seeking advice on any barriers to implementation of a proposed reclassification of combination medicines containing codeine to prescription only (**PD 23 Jan**), with the change scheduled for implementation from 31 Jan 2020.

The long lead-time is in part to allow for the development of a real-time monitoring system, which would cover restricted and prescription medicines prescribed and dispensed across NZ.

“Medsafe alongside the Ministry of Health should explore how the Committee could advocate a monitoring system,” according to the minutes of the Medicines Classification Committee meeting in Nov, which were published in final form last week.

The agency noted that there were no objections received in the 10 business days following the publication of the recommendations.

The proposal would see

medicines with codeine as the only active ingredient reclassified as a “restricted medicine” (Pharmacist Only) for oral use in adults and children over 12 in medicines containing not more than 15mg per solid dosage unit, with a maximum daily dose not exceeding 90mg of codeine for use as an analgesic and when sold in a pack of not more than three days’ supply.

Other codeine-only products would become prescription only, along with all codeine in combination medicines including both analgesics and cough/cold medications.

The Committee also recommended that bodies including the NZ Pharmacy Guild, Pharmaceutical Society of NZ, NZ Medical Association and the Pharmacy Council of NZ be written to “regarding the importance of better education and professional development for health professionals regarding acute and chronic pain management”.

‘Vegetal Vigra’ alert

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration has issued a safety warning about a product called “Vegetal Vigra” capsules, saying they pose a serious risk to health.

TGA testing has found the product contains the undeclared prescription-only substance sildenafil, and has not been assessed by the TGA for quality safety or efficacy as required under Australian legislation.

Another item, “Black Ant King Tablets,” is also the subject of a warning after TGA testing found it contained undeclared substances sildenafil and chloramphenicol.

TGA investigations have shown that a number of people in Australia may have bought these products online, with their places of manufacture not approved.



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UK pharmacy gender pay gap

A REPORT from British pharmacy giant Lloydspharmacy has revealed that its female employees earn more than 30% less than males on average - but the “median” or mid-point pay gap is more like 3%.

Almost four out of five of the retailer’s staff are female, with spokesperson Hilary Stables from parent company Celesio UK saying the reasons for the disparity are “complex”.

She said that at the time the data was gathered there were more men in senior positions within the Lloydspharmacy head office, while many of the company’s pharmacies employ a lot of part-time females.

The report also breaks down the Lloydspharmacy staff into “retail based roles” and “professional and management roles” which includes pharmacists and managers.

In the professional and management division the mean pay gap was 13%, but females in retail-based roles earned 3% more than their male counterparts on average.

Stables stressed that there was no significant difference between hourly pay rates of male and female employees within the Lloydspharmacy retail network.

“Although we realise that there is a difference between male and female pay, we do not believe there is a significant gender pay gap issue,” she said.

A new performance-based pay structure should “further narrow the gaps between gender pay,” the company added.

Clinical pharmacist interventions

ABOUT 1,826 electronic prescriptions for 549 women in the high-risk obstetrics inpatient unit of a Women’s Hospital in Brazil were the subject of a study which demonstrated that clinical pharmacist interventions were needed to identify potential prescribing errors.

Published in the *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, the prospective cross-sectional, observational research highlighted 128 errors, an error rate of 7%.

Most frequently identified were drug interaction (43.8%), incorrect frequency (21.5%) and improper dose (13.1%).

As a result 168 interventions were made, 98% of which were accepted by prescribers - academic.oup.com.

Naturopathy self-slam

FORMER naturopathic doctor Britt Maria Hermes, a graduate of America’s Bastyr University, has called herself out as a “quack” on her own blogs, reports Jane McCredie in the latest *MJA*.

Writing in her blog ‘Naturopathic Diaries’, Hermes revealed some of her subjects at the university “sounded like conventional medical offerings” but were often taught by “fake experts” and behaved as “a front for teaching pseudoscience and anti-medical ideology”.

The ex-naturopath is now doing a science degree, following an epiphany of self-awareness.

See the full *MJA* article at doctorportal.com.au.

Asthma Rx webinar



IN A project jointly funded by asthma medication companies AstraZeneca and Novartis, NPS MedicineWise will host a webinar ‘Difficult-to-treat and severe asthma: changing the paradigm’ on World Asthma Day, 01 May.

The webinar will take the form of a multidisciplinary discussion on new therapies, and how to identify and manage difficult-to-treat and severe asthma.

The discussion panel includes research and practising experts from respiratory medicine (Professor Helen Reddel), general practice (Dr H. John Fardy), psychology (Dr Juliet Foster) and nursing (Ms Leslie Vinning).

Visit nps.org.au for more detail.

Free flu vax for Tasmanian children

TASMANIAN Health Minister Michael Ferguson this week announced that children in the state aged between six months and five years will be eligible for a free influenza vaccination this season.

The program has an estimated cost of \$125,000, with the minister saying it would help take pressure off hospitals.

“For this group of children the advice is that there’s not many being vaccinated,” he said.

Ferguson noted that the program was not compulsory, “but we would like to encourage it and that is why we are paying for it”.

The move means young children in NSW, Vic, ACT, Queensland and now Tas will all be eligible for free flu vaccinations under state-sponsored programs (*PD* 02 Mar).

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Dispensary Corner

HEALTH officials in Britain have launched a review of procedures at a hospital in Ipswich after staff members asked pop star Ed Sheeran to pose for selfies and sign autographs when he was admitted for treatment of a broken arm last year.

The global megastar fell off his bike and smashed his wrist in Oct, forcing the cancellation of shows in Hong Kong, Seoul and Tokyo.

The hospital is now reviewing its policies in relation to "high profile patients" focusing on confidentiality, privacy and practical considerations.



IF ONLY it was this easy to banish the flu season.

A police department in northern New York State in the USA has issued formal charges against winter, accusing the cold weather of illegally loitering after some predictions that there will be another six weeks of snow.

The arrest was posted on Facebook by the Depew Police Department, with the tongue-in-cheek arraignment saying "any further snow you produce will be held against you in a court of law".

The officers noted that the cold season has "the right to remain silent and out of sight, but apparently not the ability.

"You have the right to an attorney but only if you turn in the groundhog that predicted six more weeks of winter," the post concluded.

Dentist ban for drug abuse

A NSW dentist has been found guilty of unsatisfactory professional conduct and professional misconduct and deregistered for a period of two years in a case brought by the Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC) before the Civil and Administrative Tribunal of New South Wales.

William Simpson was found to have self-administered codeine, oxazepam, temazepam and to have prescribed amoxicillin, clavulanic acid, diazepam, codeine with paracetamol, and cephalexin to different patients, some of which happened during a period when his registration as a practitioner was suspended.

He was also found to have been in possession of 0.58g of cocaine.

Simpson was also required to "attend for thrice weekly urine testing" but failed to submit to the order on 13 separate occasions.

Simpson admitted to many of the cited misdemeanours but not all.

Some failings, which were verified by urine testing, were not in

dispute and he conceded that he had "given inconsistent information and evidence concerning the criminal charge of possession of cocaine when furnishing information to the police, and in the proceedings before the Local Court and the District Court."

Consequently Simpson conceded that he was guilty of professional misconduct and the court ruled that it was "of a sufficiently serious nature to justify the suspension or cancellation of the practitioner's registration" even though the former dentist was of the opinion that his failings were "innocent of any significant wrongdoing".

Vax can cause the flu?

IN SPITE of the persistent rumour that having the influenza vaccine can cause one to catch the virus, the science says this is physically impossible, with all vaccines licenced in Australia being inactivated.

See more at theconversation.com.

FDA restricts Essure

THE US Food and Drug Administration has restricted the sale and distribution of Bayer's Essure implantable contraception device, after finding some women were not being adequately informed of the known risks associated with the product - more details at fda.gov.

Guild Update

Social media guidelines

THE rapid growth of social networks and other forms of online electronic publishing have emerged as important opportunities for small businesses to promote their services and the skills and knowledge of their employees to a wider audience, and to support direct engagement with customers and patients.

The Pharmacy Guild has developed a publication, *Social Media Guidelines*, for Guild members to use as a template in the development of their own social media policy.

Among other things, the guidelines stress that any policy makes clear to employees that whatever they post online must not interfere with their work commitments, be incompatible with their duties as an employee or damage their relationship with their employer.

Social Media Guidelines can be accessed by members from the Guild website.

Win with Dermal Therapy

Everyday this week Pharmacy Daily and Dermal Therapy are giving away a selection of the pictured products to the value of \$30.



Dermal Therapy Soap Free Wash is made from ingredients known for their immediate hydrating ability. Formulated and designed for dry, sensitive, itchy or flaking skin. The mild and effective soap free formula thoroughly cleanses, without stripping the skin of its essential oils. Ideal for use in the shower, bath or basin and mild enough for daily use on the entire family. Visit www.dermaltherapy.com.au to find out more.

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

True or False? Dermal Therapy Soap Free Wash is made from ingredients known for their immediate hydrating ability.

Congratulations to yesterday's winner, Elizabeth Kim.