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Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today has three pages of news, a front cover wrap for Omnicell plus a full page from:

- Direct Chemist Outlet
- Amcal

Payroll holiday

STATE and Territory Governments need to follow NSW's lead in giving businesses a "payroll holiday" to protect cashflow levels during the COVID-19 pandemic, Pharmacy Guild of Australia Queensland Branch Director, Gerard Benedet, believes.

Speaking at the Australian Pharmacy Professional (APP) Online Conference yesterday, Benedet described the move as "the gold standard" for "keeping cash in the business".

"We would encourage all states to follow that."

Staffing issues need to be addressed

PHARMACY owners and managers are being urged to protect their staff as the profession braces for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the weeks and months ahead.

Speaking at the opening session of the Australian Pharmacy Professional (APP) Online Conference, former Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Kos Sclavos, emphasised the need to protect and profile staff to tackle potential issues from stress to managing potential school closures.

Sclavos said the advice from pharmacists in countries dealing with severe COVID-19 outbreaks has been to "profile all your staff now", to ensure they are aware of risks and threats to pharmacies during the pandemic.

"Establish what happens for example if the schools close, what is their availability," he said.

"For university students, if classes are moving or suspended, are they available to do additional hours?"



"Make sure you know all these facts up front - we will be under stress in terms of capacity in pharmacy."

He added there was a need to look after pharmacy staff from a physical and mental health perspective.

"We need to protect our staff," he said.

"The staff are being abused... this is a long-haul and the stress they're going to be under will impact them."

Also speaking at APP Online,

Guild Queensland Branch Director, Gerard Benedet, said the profession needed to "bring people back" who had left pharmacy to pursue careers elsewhere or gone into roles across the profession.

Guild Vice President, Trent Twomey, called on all registered pharmacists to support efforts to increase capacity in the sector.

"We need you," he said.

"It's not just in regional, rural and remote areas."

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New Rx limits welcomed

MOVES to tackle panic buying by limiting the dispensing and sales of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications, announced yesterday (**PD** breaking news) have been welcomed by pharmacy's peak bodies, wholesalers and the pharmaceutical sector.

The new regulations will restrict the dispensing of prescription medicines to a maximum of 30 days, while pharmacists have been ordered to limit the sale of paracetamol and salbutamol to one per person, with children's paracetamol preparations to go behind the counter "to assist in allocating supply", as pharmacies manage the medication needs of patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, George Tambassis, described the move as a sensible measure to curb stockpiling of essential products.

"It is regrettable that such measures are needed, but these are unprecedented and drastic times.

"We ask all patients to understand the need for these restrictions and to be respectful towards pharmacy staff.

"With extremely high demand

and panic buying, it became clear supply interruptions would occur if nothing was done.

"We are determined that no patient in need of a medicine in Australia should be deprived of that medicine because of unnecessary hoarding by others."

Pharmaceutical Society of Australia National President, Dr Chris Freeman, described the move as "a bold decision".

"Demand for medicines has increased considerably in response to the COVID-19 pandemic which has the potential for numerous product lines to be out of stock and some pharmacists are being pressured and abused to provide unsafe quantities of medicine," he said.

"There is currently no anticipation of widespread national medicine shortages, however if current levels of demand through excessive purchasing continue, supply interruptions will occur which is why these measures have been put in place.

"We need to put the brakes on selfish buying, some members of the community, who are stockpiling medicines, are abusing pharmacists and this clearly needs to stop."

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EMA reviews COVID NSAID use

THERE is no scientific evidence linking the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen, and the worsening of cases of COVID-19, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) says. In a statement issued earlier this week the EMA said it was monitoring the situation closely and would review any new information that becomes available on the issue in the context of the pandemic.

"When starting treatment for fever or pain in COVID-19, patients and healthcare professionals should consider all available treatment options including paracetamol and NSAIDs," the agency said.

"Each medicine has its own benefits and risks which are reflected in its product information and which should be considered along with EU national treatment guidelines, most of which recommend paracetamol as a first treatment option for fever or pain."

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Dispensary Corner

HELP in the current COVID-19 situation is coming from all quarters - some of them quite unexpected.

One unusual contribution came from US TV hospital drama *The Resident*, which has donated boxes of surgical masks, gloves and gowns to an Atlanta medical facility.

A rheumatologist at Grady Memorial Hospital highlighted the gift on Instagram, hailing "the entire team @theresidentonfox for this incredibly generous donation of #PPE from your set."

"Yesterday, I had a serious discussion with the residents about how, although supplies are low, a magical shipment of masks is unlikely to arrive... and yet, a magical shipment of masks DID arrive," she added.

With production shut down, other medical dramas have also joined the fray, with ABC's *The Good Doctor* planning to donate its gear to a hospital in Vancouver, while the long-running *Grey's Anatomy* is also providing gowns and gloves to help the crisis.

AND the rise of people working from home has also led to an increase in the numbers of those seemingly with plenty of time on their hands.

Social media posts in the USA have highlighted a new trend to create so-called "quarantinis" which involve mixing vitamin C supplements with a variety of different alcoholic beverages - apparently claimed to help stave off COVID-19.

Violence will not be tolerated: Bronger

OPINION

Community pharmacist and Pharmacy Guild of Australia National Councillor, Catherine Bronger, has provided this commentary on one of the hottest issues in pharmacy at the moment.

THE COVID-19 crisis has once again seen community pharmacies rise to the occasion and go above and beyond to help patients and members of their communities.

However, unlike their efforts in recent natural disasters, pharmacists and their staff are now finding they increasingly are subject of abuse and at times violence from distraught and panicky patients.

The underlying cause is the quite bizarre trend towards stockpiling which is demonstrably unnecessary and itself simply causes shortages.

As far as medicine shortages go, the reality is that pharmacies have been facing very short-term shortages of some medicines since last year.

But the supply chain is such that generally these shortages are quickly addressed, a fact which pharmacists and staff clearly explain to patients.

Sadly, in the current situation these explanations often are falling on deaf ears.

I find myself explaining to patients that if a medicine is not in stock then it is likely to be on its way or already ordered.

I and other pharmacists go out of our way to help patients source these medicines if they are needed urgently.

Every day I am hearing of incidents where pharmacists and/or their staff are being abused, and in some extreme cases physically assaulted simply for doing their job and trying to help people.

One woman pharmacist had to undergo a CT scan after being punched while protecting a staff member from a customer who became irate after being told there was a limit to how many tissues they could buy.

Or the incident where a patient was injured when another customer threw a product at the pharmacist, missed but split the ear open of the other patient.

In my own case I have had security remove people from my pharmacy because of their behaviour.

This behaviour will not be tolerated, and I know I speak for my fellow pharmacist colleagues when I stress that the safety and wellbeing of our staff and other patients is paramount.

If people behave badly in our pharmacies they will not be served and if necessary we will call authorities to have them removed - as I have and will continue to do when necessary.

Unfortunately, this focus on the negative incidents is detracting from the great work being done by pharmacists across the country during this crisis.

Like the bushfires and other disasters, we are seeing

pharmacists and their staff working exceptionally long hours in trying conditions to help patients.

Pharmacists are going out in their own time and at their own expense to ensure that their patients who are self-isolating have their medicines.

The aged care sector is particularly vulnerable and pharmacists with high proportions of aged patients are being especially vigilant.

Some face financial losses from the April price reductions simply because they have ensured they have enough stock on hand to meet the demands of their aged patients.

All of this has to be taken in the context that pharmacists and their staff are also dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. We have staff getting sick. We have families self-isolating. We have friends needing help.

But through all this we as a profession are exhibiting the care and professionalism that is needed to help us and our communities get through this crisis.

It isn't easy and it may well get harder but if we display respect and courtesy, and recognise the great work pharmacists are doing, we will get there.



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