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Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features two pages of news, plus a full page from Sigma Healthcare.

Sigma solution

SIGMA Healthcare is offering pharmacy owners support to better manage their stores' books through its Sigma Financial Services arm.

Sigma Financial Services offers support with funding solutions, can assist with refinancing or consolidating debt, and provide financial expertise and advice tailored to individual store's needs.

See page three to learn more about Sigma Financial Services.

PPE access not good enough: Guild

POLITICAL pledges to supply personal protective equipment (PPE) from the National Medical Stockpile to community pharmacies are not coming to fruition with Primary Health Networks (PHNs) repeatedly failing to deliver, Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, believes.

Speaking during a Guild webinar last night, Twomey, said the current supply of taxpayer-funded PPE to the sector was "not good enough".

Earlier in the online event, Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, praised the work of pharmacy workers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and noted the Government had opened up "large volumes of PPE, not just to doctors, but specifically to pharmacists in NSW, Queensland and Victoria".

"That's a very important part - gloves, gowns, goggles, N95 and surgical masks, and the PHNs are supplying it," he said.

"Where there are any issues with that, Trent will let my office know and we will try to short circuit it."



Twomey welcomed the Minister's offer to intervene on the profession's behalf.

He later told delegates that, "there is a fundamental disconnect between what the Minister announces, what the elected officials believe is happening and what is being implemented by the PHNs."

"The First Assistant Secretary for the PHN wrote me a lovely letter - I'm not going to forward it to all of you - basically telling me to shut

up," Twomey said.

"I won't shut up.

"We will continue to ensure that GPs are not treated preferentially to community pharmacies.

"Whilst they can transition to telehealth, we simply cannot."

MEANWHILE, Twomey announced that Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, will address the pharmacy profession next week, during the Guild's weekly COVID-19 vaccination update webinar.

WA Forum to set scope for post-COVID

THE Pharmacy Guild of Australia Western Australian Branch is anticipating State Premier, Mark McGowan, will announce plans to extend pharmacist's scope of practice, when he addresses the Pharmacy WA Forum later this month.

WA Guild Branch President, Andrew Ngeow, said the organisation expects McGowan will outline his Government's plans to expand the role of community pharmacists in the State, when he opens the event on Thu 26 Aug.

"This is a government that was provided with unprecedented power, and one, which made a number of commitments to community pharmacy at the 2021 State General Election," Ngeow said.

"The Premier, Deputy Premier and the Minister for Small Business will outline the



Government's commitments and discuss their impact on the way community pharmacy operates."

Having been unable to host the Forum in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ngeow noted that issues around retail leasing, supply chain disruption caused by the crisis, and the introduction of electronic prescriptions, had shaped the agenda.

"These rapid changes are set to continue, and this year's Forum will provide a critical lens on how and who will provide essential primary health care services into the future," he said.

Tocilizumab shortage update

PHARMACISTS and GPs are being urged to advise patients using tocilizumab (Actemra) to contact their rheumatologist, with supply shortages expected to continue until Jan 2022.

An update released by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) said the regulator was working with manufacturer, Roche, to manage the shortage and minimise the impact on patients in Australia.

Reporting tocilizumab supply shortages last month (PD 21 Jul), the TGA said hospitals treating patients with COVID-19 would be given priority access when supplies of the medication are being distributed in Australia.

The TGA has noted that prescribers should delay starting new patients on it.



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'Take the wins as they come' - Hunt

PHARMACY lobby groups will be able to continue to push for fairer remuneration for members of the profession administering COVID-19 vaccines as part of the Government's ongoing review of its rollout program.

However, Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, told a webinar hosted by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia last night that they should "take the wins as they come", with the campaign being the first to remunerate pharmacists for administering vaccines.

Under the current remuneration structure pharmacies in metropolitan areas are paid \$42 to administer two doses to a patient, and \$48 for pharmacies in Modified Monash Model areas two or higher, while GPs can earn up to \$75 for providing the same service (**PD** 30 Jul).

Guild National President, Trent Twomey, told a webinar last week that the organisation subscribed

to the "notion that if you're doing the same job you deserve the same pay", and raised the issue with the Minister during last night's event.

"If there's one thing I can say, it's Trent is relentless and that's totally to his credit and the Guild's, but take the wins as they come," Hunt said.

"We're constantly reviewing the program, so of course you can raise these points, but each day's a good day when you're doing something you haven't previously done."

Closing out last night's webinar, Twomey reiterated his pledge "to continue to fight" for "same job, same pay" and for vaccine harmonisation across Australia.

"You heard the Minister say that we are relentless," he said.

"We are relentless to the point of being annoying and a bit of a stone in his shoe."

"I hear you - same job, same pay - I have not forgotten that, we will continue to fight for it - all vaccines, all Australians, all pharmacies."



"That's where we will end up, it will just happen in a staged approach."

Twomey also noted that while off-site vaccination services may be allowed under State and Territory regulations, "it is not allowed in the payment model", which he said was unlikely to change this year.

"I'm working on this," he said. "It will probably not form part of the architecture in 2021, [but] it will probably form part of the architecture in 2022, but who knows things are moving very quickly."

Dispensary Corner

UNDOUBTEDLY fantastic, Oxford University vaccinologist and Britain's COVID-19 hero, Professor Dame Sarah Gilbert, has now been immortalised in plastic, by toy maker Mattel.

Having received a standing ovation at Wimbledon last month, the lead designer of the AstraZeneca vaccine was selected as one of six women working in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) to get the Barbie treatment.

Gilbert told the BBC that she hoped the new doll would inspire children.

"My wish is that my doll will show children careers they may not be aware of, like a vaccinologist," she said.

Melbourne-based GP, Dr Kirby White, has also been honoured by Mattel as part of its #ThankYouHeroes program, for her role in the Gowns for Doctors initiative.

White played a key role in developing washable personal protective equipment (PPE), which has helped keep frontline workers safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brazilian biomedical researcher, Dr Jaqueline Goes de Jesus, who led the sequencing of a COVID variant, Canadian psychiatry resident, Dr Chika Stacy Oriuwa, who has advocated against systemic racism in healthcare, and US nurse, Amy O'Sullivan, who fell sick with COVID and had to be intubated, before recovering to return to care for others, have all been replicated as Barbie dolls.

COVID-19 'vaccine snobbery' in decline

BOTH the AstraZeneca (AZ) and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines are "good vaccines", that have a role to play in protecting the Australian public from the pandemic virus, Federal Health Minister, Greg Hunt, believes.

With outbreaks of the Delta strain of the virus putting Sydney and South East Queensland into lockdowns, Hunt told pharmacists that it was not a time for "vaccine snobbery", with reports that patients were opting to wait to receive the Pfizer shot, rather than accessing the country's plentiful supply of the AZ vaccine.

"I'm not supportive of any vaccine snobbery that we may have seen in parts of Australia," he said.

"Fortunately that is waning... there's a realisation that there's no place for vaccine snobbery."

Hunt said the AZ jab, which has been linked to cases of the rare clotting disorder, thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS), had saved lives around the world.

MEANWHILE, former Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr Nick Coatsworth told the *Canberra Times* that "if I gave someone the AZ vaccine today, it would be the least risky thing I did as a doctor".

PAs embrace COVAX training

MORE than 1,300 pharmacy assistants (PAs) have completed the Australasian College of Pharmacy's *Safe vaccination services in community pharmacy* program, just seven days after it was launched (**PD** 27 Jul).





Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, highlighted the training module during last night's COVID-19 vaccination update, and urged owners to encourage their staff to do it.

"I've had a lot of positive feedback [about it]," he said.



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