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Violence has to stop

AUTHORITIES are being urged to ensure people who threaten and assault pharmacy staff feel “the full force of the law”, by Pharmacy4Less CEO, Feras Karem, following a violent attack at a store near Newcastle, NSW, on Fri.

Karem told *Pharmacy Daily* that a 54-year-old man verbally abused a 17-year-old pharmacy assistant at the group’s Jesmond store, who was helping him to fill out paperwork to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, before physically attacking staff and customers at the pharmacy.

Karem raised concerns that the police took more than an hour to respond to a call from the store, and no action was taken against the perpetrator until yesterday.

“Pharmacy needs to be supported being a frontline service,” he said.

“We need to be supported from an equipment point-of-view, so we need to be provided with personal protective equipment (PPE), gloves, masks, gowns, all of that stuff like the rest of the immunisation staff.

“But PPE is physical protection from the virus, people forget that we also need protection from abuse whether it’s verbal or physical, and the police have to

turn up.

“We’re calling on authorities to take action and set an example to others, so the next guy who decides to have a rage attack in a pharmacy knows that their next step is the full force of the law and they might be spending time behind bars, and I believe that’s where they belong.”

Karem said there had been an increasing trend towards violence against pharmacy staff in recent months, noting incidents at the group’s Auburn store (*PD* 21 Oct 2020), and in Maroubra where a man who presented a forged script for an S8 medication punched a pharmacist 19 times, in May.

Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, also raised the attack at the Jesmond pharmacy with Prime Minister Scott Morrison during the Guild’s COVID-19 update last night, a move welcomed by Karem.

Today’s issue of *PD*

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See **page five** for more.

Too early to tell

EVIDENCE that asthma treatment, inhaled budesonide, could reduce COVID-19 symptoms in patients and prevent hospitalisation is promising, National Asthma Council of Australia Director, Professor Peter Wark, believes.

However, Wark said it was still too early to recommend prescribing the treatment to patients with COVID-19.

He noted that current guidelines do not recommend the use of inhaled corticosteroids for COVID-19.

Same job same pay has got to wait

DISCUSSIONS about increasing the payments the Federal Government makes to pharmacies for administering COVID-19 vaccines (COVAX) will have to wait, Prime Minister Scott Morrison, says.

Speaking during the Pharmacy Guild of Australia's latest COVAX update last night, Guild National President, Trent Twomey, told the Prime Minister that under the current structures pharmacies were "running [the program] at a loss at the moment".

Responding to Twomey's request for a review of the "lowest pay structure for the provision of COVAX that the Australian taxpayer is facing", the Prime Minister thanked the profession for participating in the vaccine rollout, but said "we're not about to make any changes to those [funding] arrangements right now".

"[Federal Minister for Health], Greg [Hunt] has been working closely with you on these funding issues," he said.

"Greg will have future conversations about this with you... that's the best way I can put it.

"We appreciate the way pharmacists are doing it and why they're doing it, but we also want to make sure that's on an ongoing basis - because this is not just two vaxes and that's it - there will be ongoing programs here, and you know that we're very keen to see pharmacists more involved in that community healthcare delivery in this country.

"Every time we've asked things of the Guild and the pharmacists across the country they've proved a very effective partner."

The Prime Minister added that there would be opportunities to look at new funding models for the community pharmacy sector in the future to reflect the services being provided by the network.

"The role of pharmacies has changed a lot over the years," he said.

"It's changing and obviously we're



going to have to change with that.

"There's an ongoing program there and I think there'll be further rounds and further opportunities to address the issues you've raised, but for now we've just got to get on with the arrangements we've set and discussed.

"This is the first time we've ever done this, so you can be pleased that it's been recognised in that way for the first time."

Federal Opposition Leader, Anthony Albanese, is scheduled to address the Guild's next COVAX update webinar on 08 Sep.

Set Up for Success: How to run a successful COVID-19 vaccination clinic in community pharmacy

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College delivers A-Z guide for COVAX

THE Australasian College of Pharmacy (ACP) and Guild Learning and Development are rolling out four new COVID-19 vaccination (COVAX) resources including an A to Z guide to the AstraZeneca vaccine.

The partnership aims to support pharmacists and pharmacy assistants by covering issues around informed consent, the use of multi-dose vials, with a video of Mater Hospital Brisbane Director of Infectious Diseases, Associate Professor Paul Griffin, answering frequently asked questions, and *An A-Z of COVID-19 vaccine AstraZeneca for Community Pharmacists* guide.

ACP President, Michelle Bou-Samra, said the resources would be available free of charge to all pharmacy staff, alongside some patient-engagement information.

"We have created these user-friendly online resources to support pharmacists and pharmacy assistants with different scenarios

they may be presented with, in their pharmacy," said Bou-Samra.

"The scenario videos guide and support pharmacists on patient-focused interactions.

"We've compiled the answers to many of the questions we've been getting, all in one place."

Bou-Samra added that the College would continue to provide new training materials to support pharmacy staff as new vaccines become available.

Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, welcomed the new resources.

"These new resources will be essential tools for pharmacists wanting to grow their knowledge base about COVAX and continue improving patient interactions," he said.

"As trusted healthcare professionals, community pharmacists are often the first point of call for information about COVID-19 and the available



vaccinations."

"While anyone administering a COVID-19 vaccine in community pharmacies has undergone the Commonwealth's mandatory training with the Australian College of Nurses, some of the information in these resources expand on pharmacist's knowledge, like the section on myths and misinformation or unpacking herd immunity and how it fits into the broader COVID-19 vaccination plan as outlined by the Australian Government."



Dispensary Corner

COVID-19 just keeps making life more challenging, with experts warning mandates on wearing face masks in some states may lead to an increase in magpies swooping this spring.

Griffith University ecologist, Professor Emeritus Darryl Jones, said the territorial birds were able to identify people's facial features and stop attacking people who regularly pass through their patch.

However, he warned that mask wearing could result in magpies swooping on everyone, he told *NCA NewsWire*.

"The mask comes into this story because most of the magpies which swoop pedestrians, do so to only one or two individuals who for some reason have become regarded as a threat," he said.

"Almost every magpie lives in a small territory with about 20 to 30 people living there with them.

"The birds never leave this patch and get to know all these people very well.

"We know that they recognise people by their facial features so when these are covered by a mask, they can't distinguish between everyone.

"So, just to be safe (in their minds), they seem to be saying 'I can't tell who is that nasty one so I had better belt everyone'."

Sadly for fans of AFL side, Collingwood, their beloved 'pies won't be swooping in on a Premiership as the competition's finals series gets underway this weekend.

Mandatory COVAX for hospital staff

THE Australia Private Hospital Association (APHA) is calling on National Cabinet to adopt a nationally consistent position mandating COVID-19 vaccination for all hospital staff.

APHA CEO, Michael Roff, said the move was essential to ensuring the health and safety of staff, patients and visitors, as well as preserving the capacity of the hospital system.

"The first step is for National Cabinet to seek urgent advice from Australian Health Protection Principal Committee on mandating COVID-19 vaccination for hospital workers nationally, including identifying a limited

range of exceptions such as medical contraindications to vaccination," he said.

"Private hospitals also call on jurisdictions experiencing a Delta outbreak to rapidly follow New South Wales' lead and mandate vaccinations for their healthcare workforce.

"The mobilisation of a huge health workforce to respond to COVID-19 while at the same time continuing provision of essential hospital services has relied on the cooperation of both the public and private health sectors and the willingness of healthcare workers and clinicians to step forward for difficult and dangerous work."

AB-Slim warning

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is warning consumers that AB-Slim Slim-cellulose capsules pose a serious risk to their health.

Tests on the product found the capsules contain undeclared quantities of prescription-only substance, sibutramine.

Consumers have been advised to take remaining capsules to their local pharmacy for safe disposal.

The TGA is working with the Australian Border Force to help stop future shipments of AB-Slim capsules from entering Australia.

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