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Moderna booster given green-light

COMMUNITY pharmacies are now able to administer both Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna's COVID-19 vaccines as universal booster shots, following fresh advice from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI).

The Moderna vaccine received approval from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) as a booster dose for individuals aged 18 years and older.

Issuing its advice yesterday the ATAGI said it considered the Moderna vaccine (50µg; 0.25mL) and the Pfizer shot, "to be equally acceptable as booster vaccines for all people aged 18 years and older, including pregnant women", with recommendations for the interval between the date patients received their second dose of a primary vaccine and becoming eligible for a booster, being reduced from six months to five.

"Both mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are preferred over the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine for the booster dose, including for people who received the AstraZeneca vaccine for

their primary course," ATAGI said.

"The AstraZeneca vaccine is not yet TGA approved as a booster but can be used as a booster for people who have contraindications to mRNA COVID-19 vaccines or who had AstraZeneca for their primary course.

"Severely immunocompromised people who are receiving a third primary dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine should receive a 100µg dose.

"A booster dose is not yet recommended for this cohort.

"ATAGI will provide advice on the timing of a booster soon."

ATAGI added that "given the likelihood of ongoing transmission of both Omicron and Delta variants, ATAGI recommends COVID-19 booster vaccination for anyone aged 18 and older who completed their primary course of COVID-19 vaccination five or more months ago".

Speaking during a press conference at Mornington Village Pharmacy, yesterday, Federal Health Minister, Greg Hunt, said



the decision to move forward the timeframe for boosters will mean "an extra 1.5 million people are now eligible to immediately access the boosters".

"With one of the highest vaccination rates in the world, with one of the lowest rates of loss of life and one of the strongest economic recoveries, Australia is doing incredibly well," he said.

"But the shorter time for boosters, the extra booster option with Moderna... gives Australians more access, earlier access, and more confidence that despite all of the challenges we'll get through it."

EczaNes wins Vic RAT tender

ECZANES Pharmaceuticals has been awarded a 12-month tender to provide its Australian-made rapid antigen test (RAT) kits to Victorian Health and other State Government departments.

Under the contract the company's RATs will be distributed to hospitals and testing facilities across Victoria.



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Digital Image scripts extended

PHARMACISTS will continue to be able to dispense Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medicines using digital image prescriptions until 31 Mar 2022, under an extended COVID-19 measure.

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features four pages of news including a photo page from **Wizard Pharmacy**.

Pharmacists deserve equal COVAX pay

AUSTRALIA'S COVID-19 vaccination (COVAX) campaign risks being derailed by the difference in remuneration being provided to GP and pharmacists to administer shots, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) warns.

PSA National President, Associate Professor Chris Freeman, said there was mounting frustration within the profession at the fees being paid to GPs for providing the same service.

Freeman noted that GPs will be

eligible to receive up to \$63.55 for administering booster jobs, while fees for pharmacists have been set at \$16 a shot.

"If the disparity isn't addressed soon, I am worried we'll see pharmacies withdrawing their involvement in the national strategy, causing further setbacks in 2022," he said.

"If pharmacists are forced to withdraw from the program, pressure will fall on already-overworked GPs and other primary care providers to deliver."



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GPs welcome telehealth boost

MOVES to fund telehealth consultations on a permanent basis are being welcomed by the Royal Australian College General Practitioners (RACGP).

Federal Health Minister, Greg Hunt, announced the allocation of \$106 million over the next four years for permanent telehealth, including \$31.8 million for with Workforce Incentive Program, to provide additional funding to general practices through the inclusion of ongoing telehealth items in the calculation of the Standard Whole Patient Equivalent.

RACGP President, Dr Karen Price, said the move was a big step forward for Australia's health system.

"Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic telehealth has proven to be a valuable complement to face-to-face care, it increased access to care for patients in need," she said.

Guild warns of Woolies' 'track record'

PHARMACY owners and regulators are being warned of the possible disruptive influence Woolworths' bid to acquire Australian Pharmaceutical Industries (API) could have on the Australian market.

Speaking during a webinar last week, Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, noted that "Woolworths does have a track record in pharmacy".

"Countdown [Woolworths' New Zealand-based supermarket brand] owns - I think 38 was the last count - discounted pharmacy offerings," he said.

"They fully waive the prescription co-payment - you think the dollar discount is causing market disruption - they waive the entire NZ\$5 co-payment."

Twomey told the webinar that the Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand had said the Countdown pharmacies had struggled to maintain staffing levels and remain open during the COVID-19



pandemic.

"Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic they are struggling to retain staff, and they have had to temporarily close some of their pharmacies," he said.

"I have no doubt they will try and reopen them, but that is the case."

In a letter to the *Australian Financial Review*, Woolworths Group CEO, Brad Banducci, stressed that the company had no plans to seek reform of pharmacy ownership and location rules,

should its bid for API be successful (**PD** 10 Dec), a view that was stated in the acquisition proposal (**PD** 08 Dec).

However, Twomey said the Guild had "a lot of questions" for politicians and "organisations like the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)", about the planned takeover.

Twomey noted the Guild had been invited to engage with the ACCC in relation to Woolworths' bid for API.

Opportunities in online pharmacy: FIP

PHARMACY regulators around the world will need to collaborate to unlock the potential benefits of technology for the community pharmacy sector, the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) believes.

In its *Online pharmacy operations and distribution of medicines* report, FIP called for greater collaboration in the development of regulations governing online pharmacies, "to tackle the possible challenges that sector faces".

However, FIP noted that "while bricks-and-mortar pharmacies are increasingly facing competition as

online pharmacies become more prominent, it is more important that community pharmacies embrace technology and further solidify their role as medicines experts at the heart of their communities".

"With appropriate regulation and remuneration models, brick-and-mortar pharmacies can adapt as needed," the report said.

"Effective programmes of public education to promote consumer awareness should be established while legislative reforms may be necessary to ensure online pharmacy practice and advertising of medicines is regulated."

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Wizard crowns its winners

WIZARD Pharmacy recently celebrated its successes at the group's annual 2021 Awards Night at Optus Stadium. Four hundred Wizard Pharmacy team members enjoyed a sit-down dinner as Wizard CEO Lyndon Dyson and COO Sally Parker announced the group's winners.

Wizard Pharmacy Bunbury Park Centre won Pharmacy of the Year, while Sacha Hoarau from Wizard Pharmacy Kelmscott Stargate was awarded Pharmacist of the Year.

The night out was a welcome change from 2020's virtual Awards Night and allowed teams to be together and celebrate their achievements from a tough year.

The night also kicked off the group's 2021 Starlight Giving Tree appeal. Last year the group raised \$50,000 to help bring joy to sick kids at the Starlight Children's Foundation, and they're hoping to reach the same amount this year.



A WELL-DESERVED night of celebration for Wizard Pharmacy teams who have worked so hard in 2021.



TEAM Leader of the Year Krystal Dean, Katrina Martin from Pharmacy of the Year Bunbury Park Centre and Team Member of the Year Maddison Mitchell.



WIZARD'S 2021 Starlight Giving Tree Appeal kick-off with Gavin Feilding, Lyndon Dyson and Starlight's Erin Corrie.



WIZARD Pharmacy Garden City teams.

BELOW: Wizard Pharmacy Service's Team Member of the Year- Natalie Curtis.



PHARMACIST of the Year- Sacha Hoarau from Wizard Kelmscott Stargate crowned by CEO Lyndon Dyson and COO Sally Parker.



WIZARD CEO, Lyndon Dyson.



THIRTY-SEVEN Wizard Pharmacies and growing!



THE Wizard Pharmacy Innaloo and Innaloo Medical teams celebrating together.

Naive pharmacist's rego cancelled

A VICTORIAN pharmacist who misappropriated more than 33,000 alprazolam tablets more than eight pharmacies over a 31-month period has had his registration cancelled.

William Trieu's registration was initially suspended from practising by the Pharmacy Board of Australia in Apr 2017 (PD 15 Nov), after the Department of Health and Human Services revealed it was investigating allegations that he had diverted large quantities of the medication from pharmacies he had worked in.

In Sep 2017 the Board received two further notifications from pharmacists who had worked with Trieu, alleging that he had stolen alprazolam, between 2014 and 2017, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal heard.

The 33-year-old was convicted of charges relating to failing to keep

required records of transactions involving alprazolam, creating false or misleading records in relation to the medication, fraudulently alerting prescriptions by adding alprazolam, unlawful possession of traffickable quantities of the drug and "numerous instances of self-administration of alprazolam", on 29 Nov 2019.

Trieu was subsequently placed on a community corrections order for 24 months, which was extended for a further 24 months after he was convicted of a further offence in Jun of this year.

The Tribunal heard that Trieu had also used cocaine regularly and methamphetamine "intermittently", and had taken alprazolam to sleep.

Prior to his sentencing in 2019, Trieu had reportedly expressed the view that his drug use never impacted his ability to practise as a pharmacist.



Handing down its decision to cancel Trieu's registration and disqualify him from seeking registration as a pharmacist for 12 months, the Tribunal heard that Trieu believed he would overcome the problems that beset him "as a young inexperienced, vulnerable and naive pharmacist", by Mar 2022.

The Tribunal noted its decision was made to "protect the public, not to punish Trieu".



Dispensary Corner

IT'S said that there is no such thing as bad publicity - and if it's true then the latest COVID-19 variant is excellent news for heavy metal band Omicron.

The Belgian headbangers have confirmed they do not plan to change the name of their group, which has been splitting ears for a couple of years now.

Lead guitarist Philippe Delhaute said things went "really crazy" when the strain hit the headlines, and while a new name for the group had been under consideration, they've decided to stick with Omicron.

"Our band isn't built around the variant," he told the UK's *Sky News*, adding "I hope we can let people know that it is something different and simply a coincidence".

Delhaute said he came up with the name for the band back in 2016 when he was reading about so-called Omicron constellations which some believe show evidence of extraterrestrial life.

He said the band felt an "extra responsibility" because of the association with COVID-19, saying "we want something good to come out of it, like people listening to our music and maybe lose the bad association".

Hygiene support

WITH 13.6% of Australians living below the poverty line, Reckitt Health AU is partnering with more than 75 charities to distribute \$7 million worth of Dettol hygiene products to counter COVID-19.

The initiative is part of Dettol's campaign to "close the hygiene gaps in Australia", with two million items being donated.

Pharmacist suspended for misconduct

A VICTORIAN Civil and Administrative Tribunal has been reprimanded and suspended for six months over professional misconduct claims.

Huyen Tran pleaded guilty to multiple charges relating to the supply of prescription only medications, including codeine-containing analgesics and diazepam, to a patient over a

three-and-a-half-year period.

The Tribunal found that Tran had dispensed the medications despite having reason to believe the prescriptions were fraudulent and failed to notify the Department of Health and Human Services of requests to dispense in quantities and at frequencies that appeared higher than reasonably necessary.

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