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Action needed as patient costs rise

STEPS need to be taken to address out-of-pocket expenses being faced by patients due to medicines shortages, Pharmacy Guild of Australia Victorian Branch President, Anthony Tassone, believes.

Tassone said the increased costs faced by patients for medications imported under Serious Shortage Medicines Substitution Notices, which do not receive Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) reimbursements, created barriers to accessing vital treatments for many.

“In situations where all generic brands are unavailable of a medicine, as has recently been the case with sertraline and for certain strengths of blood pressure lowering agent candesartan – it is unfair that patients are expected to be slugged the brand price premium for the originator brand for matters beyond the control of them and their local pharmacy,” he said.

“There are precedents for a temporary waiving of the brand price premium in the case of widespread shortages of generic brands – but this process from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and Department of Health

simply must be more responsive and be enacted more quickly so that patients aren’t unfairly left more out of pocket than necessary.

“We also need to have a more agile and streamlined way of serious shortage notices to be authorised and issued by the TGA to allow pharmacies to substitute for different strengths or forms of a medicine and maintain PBS subsidies for eligible patients to ensure continuity of care.

“As a continuing member on the TGA Medicine Shortages Working Group, the Guild will continue to advocate in the interests of patients to ensure timely and affordable access to medicines, and this would include a PBS subsidy for eligible patients for imported brands of medications to fill shortfalls of brands that are not available in Australia.”

With the COVID-19 pandemic identified as one factor behind the shortages, Tassone told **Pharmacy Daily** that the increased out-of-pocket cost for patients with chronic health conditions could further exacerbate the health crisis.

“COVID is not solely responsible for our medication shortages issue




– but has merely shone a spotlight on the frustrations and ongoing challenges that prescribers, pharmacies and patients have been faced with for years,” he said.

“The last thing we need is to make a pandemic and health crisis worse with patients not being able to access their medication for treatment of potentially serious chronic conditions.”

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news.



Recognising Depression: Training for NSW Pharmacists and Pharmacy Staff

Depression is one of the most common mental health condition in Australia, but is often under-identified because many individuals find it difficult to discuss this topic.

Recognising Depression: Training for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Staff is a highly interactive virtual workshop, giving learners the knowledge and practical strategies to better support and address anxiety disorders with their patients and their community.

This course is one training opportunity available as part of the Mental Health Community Pharmacy Program and is funded by the NSW Government.

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Pharmacy Daily

Fighting fakes

THE International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) has released a curriculum guide designed to ensure pharmacists are better able to prevent substandard or falsified (SF) medicines and medical products from reaching patients.

FIP President, Dominique Jordan, said the guide aimed to “increase and improve both education and awareness levels of pharmacists on SF medical products”.

The guide aligns with the World Health Organization’s (WHO) prevention-detection-response strategy ensuring pharmacists can identify high-risk products, prevent SF medications from reaching the supply chain, and reporting them to appropriate authorities.

CLICK HERE to access the new guide.

Active ingredient shift to boost safety

CHANGES to prescribing practices for Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and Repatriation PBS listed medicines will improve medicines safety, Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) National President, Associate Professor Chris Freeman, believes.

With new requirements coming into force from 01 Feb, most prescriptions supplied on the PBS and the RPBS will need to describe the medication by its active ingredient to be eligible for a subsidy.

Freeman said the shift in practice was unlikely to significantly impact pharmacists’ workflow, and he urged them to discuss the active ingredient when talking to patients.

“Pharmacists have an important role to play when it comes to explaining to patients why their prescriptions may look different,” he said.

“When these changes come into effect it is critical that pharmacy



staff are prepared to have the necessary conversations with patients and continue to provide information about the brand options available to them.

“It may take some time for patients to get use to describing their medicines by the active ingredient names, however in the longer term it will improve medication safety by reducing potential confusion of multiple brands of the same active

ingredient.”

Under the new regulations there will be a six-month grace period, during which pharmacists will be required to contact prescribers who issue scripts that do not contain active ingredient names, to ask them to reissue prescriptions in accordance with the new format.

However, pharmacists will not be penalised when making a claim through the PBS, if the prescriber is unable to issue a compliant script.

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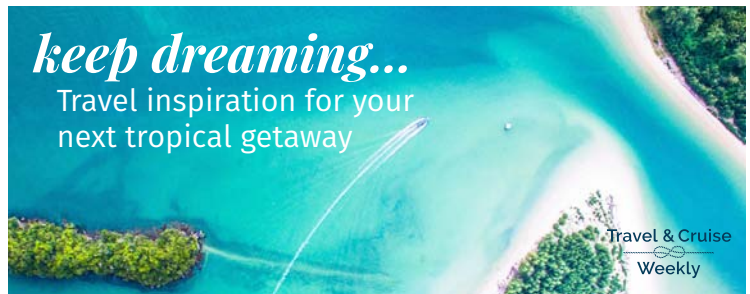
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Hand hygiene hits Priceline profits

REDUCED demand for cold and flu medications, improved hygiene and social distancing have impacted Priceline Pharmacy's profits, Australian Pharmaceutical Industries (API) CEO, Richard Vincent, told investors yesterday.

Speaking at the company's 2020 annual general meeting, Vincent, reported a 42.6% fall in underlying Net Profit After Tax (NPAT) across the API business, with its Priceline network reporting a 5.98% dip in like-for-like front of shop sales, as consumer needs changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with retail revenues down 5.2% to \$2.1 billion compared with 2019.

"The result reflects a significant fall in sales of high-margin colour cosmetics as consumer needs changed through COVID," he said. "This was combined with a fall in

demand for cold and flu medicines as people adopted better hygiene and social distancing measures."

Vincent noted the closure of 14 of the group's non-pharmacy stores, saying the lack of consistent foot traffic seen during the pandemic combined with rents meant they were "unsustainable and the decision to close these stores was unavoidable".

However, it was not all doom and gloom for Priceline, with API reporting a 69% increase in online sales, growing consumer use of the Priceline Pharmacy app, click and collect, and home delivery services.

Vincent also reported the network had filled more than 500,000 electronic prescriptions.

API's pharmacy distribution was a shining light for the business, with the division's revenue hitting



\$2.9 billion - up 6.1% on 2019 - despite the challenges of the COVID pandemic and bushfire crisis along the east coast.

Vincent added the addition of Western Australian pharmacy brand, 777 Group, was likely to deliver a further boost to the wholesaler in 2021.



ELITE performers in sport and entertainment need to keep in the best condition to stay on top of their game.

However unfortunately a sore thumb looks to have brought a premature end to the professional career of one of the world's top video gamers.

Thomas 'ZooMaa' Paparatto is only 25, but says he will have to stop playing *Call of Duty* for the foreseeable future because of the ongoing pain in his hand.

"It breaks my heart to step away from a game I put my heart and soul into every single day for eight years," he told his fans via Twitter.

Paparatto plays for a team called the New York Subliners, and recently underwent surgery for the condition.

However doctors have warned him to take it easy, and he said "I don't enjoy competing when I can't be the ZooMaa everyone knows and loves and feel like it's not fair to myself or to my team to go through all that again, potentially causing more damage to my hand."

The news has led to an outpouring of grief from his fans, who he thanked for the "love and support" they had showed him every day.

Novavax gets provisional determination

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has granted a provisional determination to Bioclect Pty Ltd on behalf of Novavax Inc, for the COVID-19 vaccine, NVX-CoV2373.

The move means the vaccine is now eligible to apply for provisional registration for inclusion on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods.

Similar determinations have been issued in relation to the

AstraZeneca/Oxford (*PD* 12 Oct 2020), Pfizer/BioNTech and Janssen Cilag (*PD* 19 Nov 2020) vaccine.

The TGA said in making the decision to grant the provisional determination, it had considered all eligibility criteria, including factors such as the evidence of a plan to submit comprehensive clinical data and the seriousness of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Telehealth pod

THE Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) has published its latest episode of its fortnightly *Taking care* podcast, with a focus on telehealth.

The podcast features insights into health practitioner and patients' experiences of telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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