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CtG changes could limit meds access

LESS than two weeks out from the implementation of changes to the Closing the Gap (CtG) Co-payment Relief program, pharmacists are warning it could create fresh problems to patients seeking to access prescription medicines.

Under the updated program, existing CtG patients will have their details transferred to the centralised database managed by Services Australia from 01 Jul, while new patients will have to be added by a registered Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) prescriber or a Medicare-registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner, to access the Federal Government funded program.

The new database will allow hospital PBS prescriptions to be dispensed under the CtG program through community and private hospital pharmacies.

However, a number of pharmacists have raised concerns that patients could see their access

to medicines limited under the new approach to the program, if their prescriber "hasn't done the paperwork" to register them.

Commenting on a Pharmacy Guild of Australia alert about the changes to the CtG program, one pharmacist said, "this is going to create a whole world of nightmares, let alone the effect on healthcare or further marginalising certain people".

Captial Chemist Group Business Manager, Andrew Topp, told *Pharmacy Daily* that the initial registration process may not be active in prescriber software programs when the change comes into affect next month.

He said that while the change would theoretically "widen the prescription pool" getting patients registered could prove challenging, leaving some eligible patients without access to PBS medicines.

Topp added that the key to the success of the CtG Co-payment Relief program was delivering an



increased uptake of prescriptions by creating savings for eligible patients who might not otherwise have the means to access critical medications.

He warned that if patients were unable to access the program due to their prescriber failing to register them appropriately, it could also impact their relationship with the pharmacy.

"This is being implemented in 14 days time, and this [Guild alert] is the first document I've seen," Topp said.

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features two pages of news, plus full pages from:

- Willach
- Sigma Healthcare

Blooms plans CEO succession

BLOOMS The Chemist CEO, Phil Smith, is set to step down from the role on 31 Dec, with the 110-store network's current Head of Retail, Emmanuel Vavoulas, to take the reins from 01 Jan 2022.

Smith described Vavoulas, who has close to 25 years' experience in community pharmacy as "a standout candidate for the role".

Vavoulas has committed to continue implementing Blooms' national growth strategy, to futureproof the brand and ensure it is at the forefront of innovation.

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No need for OTC pill push: RACGP

ARGUMENTS supporting calls for the oral contraceptive pill (OCP) to be down-scheduled to Pharmacy Only (Appendix M) no longer stand, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) believes.

In a submission to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) the RACGP said the development of telehealth services and the rollout of electronic prescriptions had negated “any argument that access to general practice is a barrier” for patients seeking the pill.

The RACGP’s submission said proposed moves to make the pill available over-the-counter (OTC) would restrict GPs’ abilities to offer “important preventative interventions such as cervical screening and make sure there have been no relevant changes to

lifestyle factors such as smoking status or sexual activity”.

The College noted that “at a time when the community has an enhanced awareness of the risk of thrombosis, and the Prime Minister has publicly stated that women are at greater risk of this life-threatening condition from taking the OCP (particularly proposal A’s cyproterone) than after receiving the COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccine, reducing clinical oversight of OCP prescribing is not prudent”.

The RACGP also warned that the move to down-schedule the pill posed a number of questions about where legal responsibility would lie for any patient harm arising from reduced clinical oversight.

“The RACGP receives numerous examples each year from our members where adverse outcomes

appear to have occurred due to pharmacist advice,” the RACGP said.

“One such example is a patient who sought emergency supply of the OCP and was dispensed a discontinued prescription for the mini pill they had once purchased at that pharmacy.

“Their GP had since prescribed a different type of OCP, which they had been purchasing from a different pharmacy.

“The mistake resulted in an unwanted pregnancy.”

Should the TGA approve the move to down-schedule the pill, the RACGP said, “pharmacies that participate in dispensing Appendix M drugs should be required to declare all commercial (financial and non-financial) arrangements with drug companies which supply the drugs in question”.



THE mastermind behind a string of armed robberies of independent pharmacies in Southern California is facing life behind bars after being found guilty of eight felony charges.

US authorities claimed that between May 2018 and Jul 2019, Tyrome ‘Boobie’ Lewis, 26, orchestrated 15 robberies, assigning roles to gang members and then served as a lookout while his “crew” stole oxycodone and other prescription painkillers, *NBC Los Angeles* reported.

Dubbed the “Oxy Bandits” by police, Lewis’s gang targeted smaller pharmacies, armed with a black semi-automatic handgun to threaten and intimidate staff.

The investigation stemmed from a partnership between the FBI and the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department that has seen 21 people charged for their roles in the heists.

A total of 19 people, including Lewis, have been convicted for their involvement in pharmacy robberies, with the remaining two defendants awaiting trial.

Lewis has been held in Federal custody since his arrest in Jul 2019, and will be sentenced at a hearing in Sep.

ATAGI to change AZ COVAX advice

THE Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisations (ATAGI) is set to update its advice regarding the AstraZeneca (AZ) COVID-19 vaccine (COVAX) today.

The experts are expected to tell the Federal Government that the vaccine should be recommended for people aged 60 years and older, *ABC News* reports.

Currently the AZ vaccine is recommended for patients aged

50 years and older.

The proposed change in advice comes after the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) confirmed a 52-year-old woman became the second Australian to die as a result of thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome, linked to the vaccine.

To date the AZ vaccine is the only COVAX approved for administration in community pharmacies.

Vic COVID alert

CHEMIST Warehouse Barkly Square, Brunswick, in Melbourne has been added to the Victorian State Government’s COVID-19 watchlist.

The pharmacy has been categorised as a Tier 2 exposure site, with shoppers who visited the store on 13 Jun between 1.20pm and 2pm being advised to get tested and isolate until they receive a negative result.

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