

## Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features two pages of news plus a full page from **Dispense Assist**.

## Novavax seeks TGA approval

**US-BASED** biotechnology Novavax has announced it has made regulatory filings to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) for its COVID-19 vaccine.

The company said it had completed its rolling submission to the World Health Organization (WHO) for an emergency use listing yesterday.

The Federal Government has previously ordered doses of the vaccine, which is distributed in a ready-to-use liquid formulation in vials containing 10 doses, and requires a two 0.5ml dose regimen, with a three-week gap between shots.

The vaccine is stored at normal fridge temperatures.

## Sigma drops its API merger proposal

**PHARMACY** wholesaler, Sigma Healthcare, has withdrawn its non-binding proposal to merge with rival, Australian Pharmaceutical Industries (API).

Sigma Chair, Ray Gunston, told the Australian Securities Exchange that the company had decided against pursuing the deal, which would have generated "\$45 million of operational synergies per annum", due to the "context of the competitive bid process, with its changing transaction

and economic considerations" (*PD* breaking news).

The decision to drop the merger proposal could pave the way for retail giant, Wesfarmers, to takeover API, following its \$1.55 per share offer (*PD* 16 Sep).

Sigma's initial cash plus scrip offer (worth \$1.57 a share) had received the backing of the API Board (*PD* 27 Sep), and would have given API shareholders a 48.8% stake in the merged entity.

# Staff shortages to drive wage growth

**PHARMACY** owners will need to review their pay structures or risk losing staff in an increasingly competitive market, *The Pharmacy Salary and Market Report 2021*, from Raven's Recruitment warns.

Now in its fourth year, the report found that the hiring of permanent staff was on the rise over the last 12 months, with Raven's General Manager, Heidi Dariz, noting that "with the current shortages of pharmacists, the number of positions available and the time taken to fill [these roles] has increased considerably".

"This has been evident in pharmacies across all regional, rural and metropolitan areas," she said.

"Employers, especially those in metropolitan areas who may have previously thought pharmacists were in oversupply are now very much aware of the shortages the industry is currently facing."

Dariz said that "the shortages of pharmacists have led to some significant pay increases over the past 12 months", and predicted that "more community pharmacists will receive a pay increase over the

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next 12 months".

Dariz noted that the report had found that more community pharmacists were looking to leave the sector due to a lack of career satisfaction.

"Many pharmacists feel the workload and responsibilities of the role of a community pharmacist do not justify the long overdue salary increases, and employers will need to look at reinvesting in training programs that offer genuine career development pathways to retain staff," she said.

The report also noted that while hospital, retail and industrial pharmacists have been added to the Priority Migration Skilled Occupations List, to support the COVID-19 vaccination rollout, "this has done little to impact the current shortages within the pharmacy workforce".

Salary information recorded in the report found that pharmacist manager roles in regional and rural NSW had the highest range, between \$125,000 and \$175,000 - excluding superannuation, while pharmacists in similar positions



in Canberra recorded the highest salary range of those working in capital cities - between \$105,000 and \$125,000.

The report also noted that locum roles have been in high demand over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, with employers seeking support when permanent staff have been required to isolate.

Dariz said demand for locums was likely to continue with employers and permanent employee pharmacists hoping to take "a well-earned holiday", as border restrictions are eased.

**CLICK HERE** to access the full report.

## Qld pharmacies to drive COVAX delivery

**QUEENSLAND'S** community pharmacies are stocked and ready to "propel the State closer to its vaccine goals", Pharmacy Guild of Australia Queensland Branch President, Chris Owen, believes.

With more than 1.75 million doses of AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines administered through the pharmacy network nationally, Owen said the availability of shots through local pharmacies would be key to boosting uptake in Queensland. "There are approximately



220,000 Moderna vaccines, and 270,000 vaccines that are available across the State as of today," he said.

"These figures position pharmacies to continue driving vaccinations across our state."



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## Booster remuneration needs fix: Guild

**ACCESS** to Australia's COVID-19 booster vaccination program will be severely limited, if the Federal Government does not "correct the remuneration" for pharmacies, an industry leader warns.

Speaking during a webinar on Wednesday night, Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, told delegates that he had written to Federal Health Minister, Greg Hunt, "highlighting the very real clinical concerns" the organisation had in relation to the rollout of the Pfizer-BioNTech boosters.

To date 1,156 pharmacies have been approved to participate in the program - less than half the number currently administering primary doses of COVID-19 vaccines.

"We have State and Territory vaccination clinics phasing out and it will be the responsibility of primary care - which is us and our general practice colleagues - to ensure that we provide all of Australia with their booster shots," he said.

"Now we have enough stock, but we also need to make sure we have enough points of presence, and quite frankly I don't blame community pharmacies for not taking up this as enthusiastically as they have the Moderna and AstraZeneca programs.

"We all did that. Georgina and I did it in our pharmacies.

"We did it not for money, but for the right reasons, but we lost money on it.

"And the booster program again is slightly different, it's a multi-dose vial, but we have to dilute the vial before we administer [doses].

"Sure we got the skills and knowledge to perform this extra task, but we can't be expected, in the public interest, to do this at a loss."

Twomey thanked the 1,156 pharmacies that have agreed to participate in the booster program, which will start next week, but noted that group represented less than one-in-five community pharmacies across the country.

"I have written to the Minister, I've cc'd in the Lieutenant General [John Frewen - the head of the COVID-19 Vaccination Taskforce] and the First Assistant Secretary [of the Department of Health] saying, 'listen I can't get these numbers up any higher, unless you correct the remuneration,'" he said.

"It is not fair, and it's not right that members of our profession are expected to do this as a loss."

**MEANWHILE**, Twomey confirmed that once doses of the Pfizer



vaccine are delivered, participating pharmacies will be able to administer them as primary doses for patients aged 18 years and older, as well as booster shots.

The Guild President also flagged that partial submission has been made to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) for the Pfizer vaccine to be approved for use in children aged five to 11 years.

Should the TGA follow the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in approving the vaccine for children over five years, Twomey said an additional 2.3 million Australians would become eligible to be immunised.

Under regulations in several jurisdictions pharmacists in those states would automatically be authorised to administer vaccines to children in line with TGA approvals.

## Dispensary Corner

**CANADIAN** pharmacists are being warned to be on the lookout for potential vaccine fraud.

The Saskatchewan College of Pharmacy Professionals (SCPP) has noted that an unspecified number of people have paid others to take their place during the COVID-19 vaccination rollout, to avoid having to receive the jab themselves.

The SCPP has advised members to ensure patients provide government-issued ID to prove their identity before administering shots.

Saskatchewan Health Authority CEO, Scott Livingstone, said he was aware of reports surrounding alleged instances of vaccine fraud, but was unable to say "how prominent the problem is".



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