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Guild warns of increased drug costs

PLANS to increase the ex-manufacturer price of specific Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) listed medications to encourage pharmaceutical companies to maintain stock levels, could hurt patients' pockets, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia warns.

Under the proposed *National Health Amendment (Enhancing the PBS) Bill 2021* - which has received bi-partisan support - manufacturers of medications that have been identified as being at risk of supply shortages, will be required to maintain at least six-months' supply of the drugs.

With below PBS co-payment prescriptions accounting for close to one-in-three medicines dispensed under the scheme, increases in ex-manufacturer prices would see the cost of medications increase for patients,

or force pharmacies to absorb the price hikes - a move the Guild has rejected, *BioPharma Dispatch* reported.

Guild National President, Trent Twomey, told the publication that the organisation had raised concerns about the impact the Bill could have on the affordability of medicines for Australians.

"We have raised with the Government that this may result in increased costs," he said.

"Out-of-pocket expenses for medicines [for Australian patients] are already the fourth highest in the OECD, after the US, Canada and Switzerland."

MEANWHILE, Australian Labor Party MP, Peta Murphy, backed the Government's Bill, but noted "it is a shame that it's reactionary, after people have experienced the consequences of not being able to



access medicines, of not being able to pay for medicines and of the global supply chain shortages - not beforehand".

"It's why it's really important to have vision - vision like Labor's proposal for a reconstruction fund to support manufacturing, to diversify manufacturing and to manufacture medicines as we come out of COVID," he said.

PharmX solutions

ELECTRONIC stock management and invoicing platform, PharmX, aims to deliver solutions to support pharmacists to focus on delivering health services.

See **page four** for more.

TGA clamps down on ivermectin ads

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has fined a NSW-based individual \$7,992, for allegedly advertising ivermectin and zinc lozenges to treat COVID-19, in breach of the *Therapeutic Goods Act 1989*.

The TGA has previously warned consumers and advertisers about illegal advertising relating to COVID-19.

"The individual allegedly claimed, on their website, that ivermectin and zinc lozenges are effective in the treatment of

COVID-19," the TGA said.

MEANWHILE, crossbench MP, Craig Kelly, criticised the TGA's decision to restrict "prescribing ivermectin through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for COVID-19, denying sick Australians access to a medicine that many medical experts believe could save lives."

Kelly told the House of Representatives that the restrictions were related to supply shortages, but noted the TGA had not taken steps to boost supply.

Today's issue of PD

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

- PharmX
- APP 2022

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ORGANISERS of next year's Australian Pharmacy Professional (APP) conference are offering delegates the opportunity to win a car. See **page five** for more.



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Click here for more info

Pharmacists back HIV self-test push

COMMUNITY pharmacists are set to offer HIV self-tests in store from the middle of next month, following the Therapeutic Goods Administration's decision to authorise their supply in Oct (PD 01 Nov).

Atomo Diagnostics Managing Director, John Kelly, said the decision to open pharmacy channels for supply of the company's Atomo HIV Self-Test and the removal of prohibitions on advertising the product direct to consumers, was a step forward in the fight against HIV transmission in Australia.

"The significant broadening in the availability of HIV self-testing, reinforces just how critical a role self-testing increasingly plays in the delivery of improved health outcomes," he said.

The Atomo test kits will initially be rolled out through the Pharmacy 777 network in Western Australia, and Sydney's Serafim Pharmacy,

with the devices retailing for \$25 each.

Pharmacy 777 Group's Kristian Ray welcomed the introduction of HIV testing services in pharmacies.

"Having the self-test available in pharmacy is an important step in community pharmacy's role in HIV prevention," she said.

"We are also working to improve access to support across the State including regional locations where local services may be limited."

Australian Federation of AIDS Organisation (AFAO) CEO, Darryl O'Donnell, said the self-test kits were a critically important tool to help people know their HIV status.

"Once people know their status they can start treatment which allows them to completely suppress the virus, preventing further transmission," he said.

"Testing is the first step and this device gives people who wish to test the choice to do so at home.

"While stigma and discrimination



are easing they still present barriers for many people knowing their status. Being able to perform a finger prick test in the comfort of your own home will encourage more people to test for HIV."

O'Donnell noted that there was compelling Australian research showing that access to self-tests would increase testing among people who would not otherwise see a doctor to get tested, or who need to test regularly.

Boosters need fresh approach

THE Australian Medical Association (AMA) is calling on the Federal Government to adopt a more vigorous approach to the COVID-19 booster vaccine program following the emergence of the Omicron variant.

AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, said the Government had "failed to adequately fund general practice" to take a proactive approach to the booster campaign.

"Without funding for general practice to follow these patients up and encourage them to come forward, hard to reach groups, older Australians and those that are hesitant about a booster dose will be left behind and put at risk of infection," he said.

"At this point in the pandemic we cannot afford to become complacent."

Qld Guild offers retaining opportunity

JOB seekers in the greater Brisbane area are being urged to take up the opportunity to retrain as a pharmacy assistant through the Queensland Government's Skilling Queenslanders for Work Program.

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia Queensland Branch will run a fully subsidised seven-week course from 17 Jan 2022.

Guild Queensland Branch President, Chris Owen, noted



that the organisation trained more than 150 people to take on pharmacy assistant roles over the last 12 months.

CLICK HERE to register.

MDR scoop Pharmacists' Choice Award

MEDTECH firm, MedAdvisor (MDR), topped the voting for the Pharmacists' Choice: Pharma Company of the Year Award, at the PRIME Awards last week.

MDR CEO, Robert Read, said it was humbling to take home the title.

"MDR doesn't have an army of sales people lobbying pharmacists to vote for us, in fact, we actually didn't know we were nominated until a few

weeks ago," he said.

"The other thing that's striking is that while we're not a pharmaceutical company, we connect the pharma industry to people using their medication, via our pharmacy network.

"The backdrop of the pandemic demonstrates why it's important for a company like MedAdvisor to exist, we're playing an active role in supporting vaccination efforts, particularly in Australia."

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Dispensary Corner

US-BASED pharmacist, Neeta Raval, is facing fraud charges after allegedly bribing the former owner of two adult care facilities to switch to her pharmacy in exchange for a holiday.

Authorities in Michigan received a tip-off about the adult care home owner, Holly Purdy, in 2019, after she switched her business to the pharmacy where Raval worked, *Livingston Daily* reported.

Testifying at a hearing last month, a Michigan State Trooper said, "She [Purdy] went to the pharmacy and made a deal with Neeta Raval, that she would give her business as long as she got a trip to Spain and that is why she switched".

The State Trooper added that the 64-year-old pharmacist had admitted offering the free holiday in a bid to secure the contract for the two care facilities, and showed police a \$2,725 charge to Royal Caribbean for the trip.

Neither Raval nor Purdy appeared for their scheduled arraignment hearing last week.



Mixed views on Board

DATA from a social research project conducted on behalf of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) found that just one-in-10 pharmacists associate the word "fair" with the Pharmacy Board of Australia.

However, more than two-thirds of pharmacists said they trusted the Board, with 56% saying they were confident it was doing everything it could to keep the public safe.

"I have faith that it is a properly established institution and have no reason to doubt their integrity," one pharmacist said.

While another noted that "decisions on the whole are consistent and fair, but they need greater resources to protect pharmacy from negative franchise influence and indirect ownership".

Of the 9% of respondents who said they did not trust the Board, one pharmacist said it was "out of touch with contemporary practical issues that pharmacists are dealing

with", while another sought greater transparency on its expenditure.

The 2020 social research project also found that 50% of pharmacists viewed the Board as being regulators in 2020, while 34% associated it with being "necessary" and "bureaucratic".

Less than one-in-four pharmacists felt the Board was "for practitioners" (down from 29% in 2019) with 24% viewing it as being "for the public" (a decrease from 28% last year).

The project also found health practitioners' perceptions of pharmacists changed in 2020.

Compared with the average across all AHPRA regulated professions, pharmacists received significantly higher ratings for trust, being knowledgeable, community-minded, approachable and hard working.

However, they received significantly lower than average ratings for their empathy, compassion and passion.

Guild Update

Clinical updates a highlight

CLINICAL updates from leading experts in their relevant fields will be a highlight of the Pharmacy Professional Conference & Trade Exhibition (APP) being held 24-27 March 2022 on the Gold Coast.

APP convenor Kos Sclavos said the list of clinical sessions on offer was extensive and the calibre of presenters extremely high.

"Whether it's the management of infantile eczema, information about Vitamin D or critical clinical advice about how community pharmacists should work with patients dealing with mild cognitive impairment, APP2022 has it covered," Mr Sclavos said.

Mr Sclavos also said he is looking forward to hearing some of the global learnings and application from those who developed and are manufacturing the COVID-19 vaccines.

"Representatives from all three of the COVID-19 vaccines approved in Australia will be presenting.

"This should make for some very engaging discussion around the vaccine roll-out and international learnings we can take on board as we deliver for our local communities".

The APP2022 program is available at appconference.com/app-program.

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