

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news.

WA pharmacies' unsellable RATs

WESTERN Australia's failure to use existing supply chain infrastructure, including the community pharmacy network, to roll out free COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RATs), was a missed opportunity State Shadow Agriculture Minister, Martin Aldridge, believes.

Speaking in the WA Legislative Council last week, Aldridge noted that the rapid shift in policy around RATs - from being unlawful to the market being flooded with them - had left pharmacies with "largely unsellable" stock of the tests.

"I think this was a missed opportunity to utilise the supply chains that already existed, particularly outside Perth, for our community pharmacies," he said.

"I think the Commonwealth used that opportunity better in terms of its program for pensioners."

PSA makes election plea

PHARMACEUTICAL Society of Australia (PSA) National President, Associate Professor Chris Freeman, is calling on politicians to prioritise improved access to healthcare through "fairer remuneration for pharmacist-delivered services".

With the Federal Election set for 21 May, Freeman called on politicians of all stripes to look to address inequitable consumer access to healthcare.

"The Australian public and pharmacists have faced immense challenges and pressures over the past 24 months," he said.

"Now, more than ever, is the time to ensure that access to healthcare remains universal, particularly for the most vulnerable of the population.

"Consumers need subsidised access to care in the health setting and their qualified health professional of choice.

"Consumers face out of pocket expenses for the administration of the influenza vaccination under the National Immunisation Program (NIP) if delivered by their pharmacist, whereas, receive subsidies if done at a GP.

"It is unacceptable for a consumer not to receive this subsidy for



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exactly the same service delivered by a qualified health professional in a setting of their choice.

"When it comes to case conferences, a critical multidisciplinary process for ensuring quality of care, pharmacists are the only allied health provider that government does not remunerate for their time and participation.

"This is unacceptable, and at the end of the day, Australians are losing out.

"Introducing a Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) payment to pharmacists for administering NIP vaccines, and a separate MBS rebate for pharmacists to be remunerated for participating in multidisciplinary case conferences, would increase consumer access to pharmacist skills and expertise.

"If these pay disparities continue to exist, it will have dire consequences on Australia's healthcare system, ultimately leaving patients out of pocket.

"It is absolutely critical that the incoming government places consumers at the forefront of their policy decisions, ensuring that pharmacists can continue to deliver essential services."

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Morrison to name Hunt's successor

PRIME Minister, Scott Morrison, will name his preferred pick as the next Federal Health Minister within the next week.

With uncertainty around the make up of a Labor-led cabinet, Morrison said he would clarify who he would like to replace retiring Federal Health Minister, Greg Hunt, before Australians go to the polls on 21 May.

Communications Minister, Paul Fletcher, and Environment Minister, Sussan Ley - who previously served as Health Minister, under Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull - have been named as front-runners to succeed Hunt in the role, *The Guardian* reported.

Opposition Leader, Anthony Albanese, has said he expected his current Shadow Ministers would retain their current briefs if they win the election.

No action over threatening message

A WESTERN Sydney-based pharmacy owner has been told by NSW Police that a complaint about a threatening card featuring her photo with a gun pointing into her mouth drawn on it, "won't go anywhere".

Morris Care and Advice Pharmacy proprietor, Veronica Nou (pictured), said she was feeling "irritated" in a post on Facebook over the weekend saying that "some anonymous idiot has sent me a card".

"They've drawn a gun to my mouth on a photo from a recent news article on the Affordable Medicines Now campaign, and written some unintelligible nonsense alongside it," she said.

"It's a damn trying time to be a pharmacist I can tell you."

Nou, who has been a tireless advocate for the community, receiving the 2020 NSW Humanitarian Awards, Refugee Support of the Year title (PD 23 Jun 2020), told *Pharmacy Daily* that

she initially didn't give the card much thought, but her colleagues had urged her to contact the police about the threat.

She said the store had received letters in the past urging the pharmacy's team not to administer COVID-19 vaccines, suggesting that they were committing crimes against humanity by giving the immunisation, similar to those sent to pharmacies across the country.

However, she said the card had come in an envelope directed specifically to her, with handwriting that appeared to be deliberately disguised.

When she contacted the police they told her she was welcome to come in and make a statement, but it was unlikely to be followed up on.

"It felt dismissive," she said.

Nou told *Pharmacy Daily* that she understood why many women are reticent about making complaints to the police, noting "you feel like it's not serious



enough for them".

The threatening card came 15 months after she was left stunned by a patient who grabbed her head while she was counselling another customer (PD 06 Jan 2021).

At the time Nou noted that a number of people in the community around her pharmacy were "deep into conspiracy theories" about COVID-19 and were distrustful of authorities.

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Dispensary Corner

A PROPENSITY to drink alcohol may be something inherited from our primate ancestors, according to a study published by the University of California Berkeley earlier this month, which confirmed monkeys "routinely consume fruit containing alcohol".

Scientists analysed the ethanol content of fruit eaten by spider monkeys in Panama, finding that it regularly contained alcohol concentrations of 1-2%.

They also collected urine samples from the creatures which contained secondary metabolites of ethanol.

"The results provide further evidence that our primate ancestors preferentially sought out fermented, alcohol-containing fruit likely for its greater nutritional value, and that humans may have inherited this proclivity for ethanol," the report concludes.

The study was led by primatologist Christina Campbell, who said "for the first time we have been able to show, without a shadow of a doubt, that wild primates, with no human interference, consume fruit-containing ethanol," she said.

"This is just one study and more needs to be done, but it looks like there may be some truth to that 'drunken monkey' hypothesis," Campbell added, with human drinking tendencies stemming from a deep-rooted affinity of fruit-eating primates for naturally occurring ethanol within ripe fruit.

Teen COVAX booster

PFIZER'S Comirnaty COVID-19 vaccine (COVAX) is set to be rolled out as a booster for adolescents aged 12 to 15 years, subject to guidance from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI).

The mRNA-based vaccine was granted provisional approval for use as a booster for adolescents by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) on Fri.

"TGA provisional approval is the first step in the two green light approval process consistently applied throughout the COVAX program," the regulator said.

"This decision follows the provisional approval granted by the TGA to Pfizer for the use of Comirnaty as a booster in individuals 18 years and older on 26 Oct 2021 and in individuals 16 and 17 years old on 27 Jan.

A booster dose of Comirnaty may be administered intramuscularly at least six months after the completion of a COVAX primary series (two doses) in individuals aged 12 years and over.

"The primary series can be of any



of the COVAX approved for use in this age group, although data on the use of Comirnaty as a booster with other COVAX is limited.

"Regulatory approval of the booster dose for this age group has also been granted in Israel, the UK and the US.

"The TGA continues to work very closely with international regulators to align regulatory approaches, share information and, where it speeds up evaluation, collaboratively review COVAX and treatments.

"The ATAGI will provide advice shortly on whether this vaccine should be included in the COVAX program as the final step in the two green light approval process."

Rockliff a good fit for Tasmania: Guild

TASMANIA'S new-look leadership team's experience in the State's Health portfolio will be key to boosting its post-COVID-19 recovery, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia believes.

Tasmanian Guild Branch President, Helen O'Byrne, noted that both newly appointed Premier, Jeremy Rockliff, and his Deputy Premier, Michael Ferguson, "have both held the Health portfolio during their parliamentary careers".

"It bodes well for Tasmania's economic and social recovery for the pandemic that both have a deep understanding of the health needs of our community, and importantly where change is needed," she said.

"Particularly through the pandemic we have enjoyed open and regular dialogue with the State Government, which has enabled community pharmacies to provide broader and much needed access to health services within their local communities."



Weekly Comment

Welcome to Pharmacy Daily's weekly comment feature. This week's contributor is

Jeanette Drury,
Wizard Pharmacy Chief
Pharmacist and Franchisee.



Personalised professional services

I'M WIZARD'S Chief Pharmacist, but I'm also a Wizard franchisee who owns several pharmacies with my husband Adam, who is also a pharmacist.

The Wizard Professional Services team and I spend a lot of time in our franchisees' pharmacies, supporting them and the professional development of their teams to deliver better patient outcomes whilst maximising dispensary revenue.

I enjoy working alongside our broader team of Wizard pharmacists as it allows me to keep one ear on the ground. The healthcare landscape is changing fast, and for a sustainable future, we need to continue to adapt and innovate. Being in-store allows me to understand what is and isn't working to help our franchisees deliver better care and reduce unnecessary stress.

I also understand that each of my pharmacies has a different customer profile. Each pharmacy needs a tailored service offering to best meet its community's needs.

As a fellow pharmacy owner, I understand the importance of your health services to the community and the challenges in keeping up with constant change.

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