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### Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news.

## Health system fails rural Aussies

**REACTIVE** piecemeal approaches to tackling rural workforce shortages and inequitable access are failing to deliver improved outcomes, the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) believes.

The organisation has called for the development of a proactive National Rural Health Strategy to oversee whole of system change.

"It is inexcusable that people in rural and remote communities are denied reasonable access to health care and have around half the number of health providers per capita than major cities, the NRHA said.

"If rural health services don't exist, people cannot access the health care they need."

The NRHA added there was a \$4 billion spending shortfall due to a lack of access to services.

## Pharmacist in coma after toxic wine

**SYDNEY-BASED** pharmacy-owner, Hans Morkos, is in an induced coma after inadvertently consuming liquid methylamphetamine disguised as wine, that had been sent to his Annandale store.

The incident, which occurred on 31 Jan, was brought to the attention of NSW Police earlier this week, when one of Morkos's employees went to Glebe Police Station to report an alleged intimidation offence.

A police spokesperson told *Pharmacy Daily* that a 42-year-old man went to the female pharmacy worker's home on Mon evening, where he threatened her and demanded money.

"Officers attached to Campsie Police Area Command subsequently commenced an investigation into the incident," the spokesperson said.

"Following inquiries, a 42-year-old man was arrested at Panania on Tue.

"The man was taken to Campsie Police Station and charged with stalk/intimidate intend [to cause] fear [of] physical harm.

"He was granted conditional bail and is due to appear at Bankstown Local Court on Tue 01 Mar.

"During the investigation, police were notified of an incident at a pharmacy at Annandale on Mon



31 Jan.

"Officers were told a male employee [Morkos] – aged 43 – had suffered a medical episode.

"The man was located by the 37-year-old woman who contacted NSW Ambulance paramedics.

"He was taken to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, where he remains in an induced coma.

"An investigation into the circumstances surrounding the man's injuries is currently underway by officers attached to Leichhardt Police Area Command.

"As part of ongoing inquiries, a

crime scene warrant was executed at the business and a number of items were seized for further examination."

The NSW Police spokesperson was unable to provide further information regarding the incident.

However, *The Daily Telegraph* has identified the man who allegedly threatened the female staff member was Morkos's brother, Amir Banoub.

The publication also reported that Morkos's pharmacy has been placed in the hands of administrators following the incident.

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## PPA seeks share of COVAX payments

**UNION** group, Professional Pharmacists Australia (PPA) is calling on pharmacy owners to “pass on the COVID-19 vaccination (COVAX) payments” to frontline staff.

In a petition to the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, the organisation noted that pharmacists “have played a vital role in supporting the community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic”, but were “chronically underpaid”.

“Despite the crucial role pharmacists have played through the pandemic, they are not receiving adequate workplace support or compensation,” the PPA said.

“As well as increased rates of pay, pharmacists should receive direct incentive payments for every COVAX administration, like GPs and pharmacy owners.

“It’s time pharmacy owners pass on the COVAX payment and profits made from the pandemic to employee pharmacists who are on the frontline.

“Until pay rates increase the industry will struggle to retain and attract professionals, increasing the already significant skill shortage.”

Responding to the PPA’s call for profit sharing, Guild Victorian Branch President, Anthony Tassone, told **Pharmacy Daily**, that such an approach was not viable under the current COVAX remuneration being given to pharmacies.

“Pharmacies are currently remunerated substantially less than general practice in delivery of COVAX, so remuneration models calling for a share of the profits per occasion of service to be passed onto employees run into immediate challenges where the service is not highly profitable,” he said.

“It also may have unintended consequences with employees preferencing certain tasks or health services in the pharmacy over other roles including the core clinical function of dispensing and offering advice of medication.”

Tassone noted that “immunisation



is considered part of the scope of practice of a pharmacist with general registration who undertakes additional training”.

“Employers may meet the costs of this training if an employee is delivering vaccinations as part of their role.

“Employees who up-skill and professionally develop to perform different health services for patients may seek to have this considered as part of their remuneration agreement with the pharmacy.”

## New Pharmacy programs in 2023

**THE** University of Sydney’s School of Pharmacy has announced two new combined Bachelors and Masters will be launched next year.

The five-year Bachelor of Pharmacy (Honours)/Masters of Pharmacy Practice course will replace the current BPharm and intern training program, with the new six-year Bachelor of Pharmacy and Management (Honours)/Master of Pharmacy Practice to be introduced in place of the existing Bachelor of Pharmacy and Management course.

The new courses will incorporate an intern training program and provide advanced learning in the form of a Masters qualification, with students undertaking an Honours research project.

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## US pharmacy chain reports data breach

**US PHARMACY** giant, CVS, has revealed it has experienced a cyber-security incident that has resulted in the personal information of more than 6,000 customers being compromised.

The group has sent out data breach notification letters to clients impacted by the incident.

Law firm, Console and Associates PC reported that while details about the breach were

“sparse...it appears as though an unauthorised party was able to breach the company’s network servers and gain access to certain individuals’ names, addresses and protected health information”.

The firm noted that while there was no evidence to suggest that CVS was legally responsible for the breach, it said “that could change” as further details about the cause of the incident emerge.

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The Pharmacy Guild of Australia





## Dispensary Corner

**MOST** would-be thieves attempt to cover their hands to avoid leaving incriminating fingerprints. However, for one pharmacist-turned bandit keeping his hands ungloved is allegedly the key to giving him access to scoring a haul of prescription medicines, from a pharmacy he worked in. Kansas City-based pharmacist, Benjamin Dandurand, allegedly used his fingerprint to access a medicines safe, removing a quantity of oxycodone hydrochloride, before replacing it with "an alternative liquid substance" on a number of occasions between Jul and Oct 2020, the US Attorney's Office District of Kansas reported.

A Federal Grand Jury indicted Dandurand on four charges earlier this week, including one count of tampering with a consumer product and three counts relating to the possession of tramadol, zolpidem and oxycodone hydrochloride by deception and subterfuge.

The US Food and Drug Administration, and the Drug Enforcement Agency are investigating the allegations against the 34-year-old pharmacist.



## Pharmacies need post-COVID plans

**PHARMACY** owners are being urged to refresh their business plans to meet the needs of their communities in a post-COVID-19 environment.

Speaking on the latest episode of the *Sirianni Market Update*, Medici Capital Managing Director, Frank Sirianni, said that while the community pharmacy sector has responded well to meet the needs of communities across the country during the pandemic, owners needed to set out plans for the future.

"Pharmacy owners and their teams have generally been extraordinarily good at pivoting to meet the new community needs, as well as dealing with the pressure that they're under," he said.

"[But they] need to recognise that the world has changed, that to some degree the market and the community wants services delivered in different ways and

many want different types of services, and you've got to think about how you go about that.

"For some pharmacies that might mean you've got to change the way they deliver services, to recognise the community's anxiety and worry about COVID and its impact, because it's fairly clear that this is going to be ongoing for some time.

"For others it means that their business has morphed into a new form of pharmacy, which is perhaps more professional, perhaps with a greater service orientation.

"You've got to really think about how you build the business and have a business plan or focus on how you're going to address those new needs, because clearly that can't be sustained under the previous business models that a lot of pharmacies have."

Sirianni added that a focus on maintaining the physical and mental health of staff should be a



priority area for pharmacy owners and managers going forward.

"All pharmacies have been under some form of strain [due to the pandemic] and this needs to be recognised," he said.

"You need to put a wellbeing plan in place to make sure that you don't get all of these extraordinary outcomes that can be bad for your long-term health as well as your business health."

## MedAdvisor makes trans Tasman move

**AUSTRALIAN** medtech firm, MedAdvisor, is entering the New Zealand market through a three-year deal with primary healthcare provider, Green Cross Health.

The agreement will give MedAdvisor access to almost 40% of NZ's pharmacy market, through Green Cross's Unichem and Life Pharmacy brands.

Announcing the new deal this morning MedAdvisor told the Australian Securities Exchange that the company will earn both software as a service (SaaS) and transaction fees that are similar to Australian pricing.

"MedAdvisor expects that the total revenue from the agreement in its first full year of



operation will be less than 5% of the total MedAdvisor group revenue for the same period," the company said.

MedAdvisor Managing Director, Robert Read, said the companies "share the common goal of strengthening the relationship between pharmacies and their customers and using technology to improve health outcomes".

## Sigma Board appointment

**SIGMA** Healthcare's new CEO, Vikesh Ramsunder, has been appointed to the company's Board with immediate effect.

Ramsunder joined Sigma earlier this month, having been named as former CEO, Mark Hooper's successor last year (*PD* 24 Sep 2021).

Ramsunder's appointment to the Board is set to be confirmed by a resolution of Sigma shareholders at the company's annual general meeting on 12 May.

Prior to joining Sigma Ramsunder was CEO of South African pharmaceutical wholesaler, the Clicks Group.