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Prioritise testing for frontline workers

PRESSURE is mounting on the Federal Government to fund the provision of free rapid antigen test kits (RATs) for all Australians, with employee pharmacists' union Professional Pharmacists Australia (PPA) calling for health workers to be given priority access to them.

PPA CEO, Jill McCabe, described the current issues around accessing RATs and PCR tests as "an indictment on the Federal Government", and stressed the need for pharmacy workers to be able to get tested.

"Pharmacists should have priority access to RATs as part of the broader frontline health workforce," she told *Pharmacy Daily*.

"These workers front-up everyday, risking their own health for the good of the community - it's a small thing to ask that they be provided access to RATs.

"It is also in the community's interest that frontline health workers are able to test quickly and efficiently given the constraints on the health system we're experiencing."

In a separate statement, McCabe said that access to RATs should not be restricted to "just those who can

afford to buy the tests".

"We represent the vast majority of pharmacists in Australia – employee pharmacists – and we're calling on the Federal Government to act urgently and provide the tests free to all given the surge in cases and the change in testing regimes," she said.

"The virus hasn't changed just because the Federal Government's definitions and approach to testing has changed."

PPA President, Geoff March, warned the impact of maintaining the Federal Government's current policy on RATs would create financial hardship for workers going forward.

"Employee pharmacists are on the frontline of this issue, constantly running out of supply and seeing the look on people's faces when they struggle to pay for tests," he said.

"Most Australians find the cost of testing their family prohibitive - if they're able to find testing kits at all.

"If Australians have to rely on the private sector to get Covid tests, they will be paying up to \$20 each - that's \$100 for a family of five for just one test each time.

"In the future more workers will



need to access the tests before going into work so the financial strain will increase.

"We are concerned about the dire shortage in the supply of RATs, the prohibitive cost and the intensifying pressure on working pharmacists dealing with this issue, as well as continuing the vaccination program which now includes boosters and children's vaccination."

March also noted that while the Government increased funding for the administration of COVID-19 booster vaccinations through pharmacy (*PD* breaking news 22 Dec 2021), "this is not being shared with the pharmacists who are working harder than ever before".

Today's issue of *PD*
Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news.

Ad code update

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) will host a webinar on 20 Jan to guide advertisers through the new Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code 2021.

The Code came into effect on 01 Jan, and advertisers will be required to comply with it from 01 Jul, when the six-month transition period from the 2018 Code expires.

The webinar will outline the TGA's expectations and what advertisers can do during the transition period.

[CLICK HERE](#) to register.

TGA issues RAT repack warning

PHARMACISTS and other COVID-19 rapid antigen test (RAT) vendors are being urged to be aware of their obligations before repacking or relabelling the products.

In a statement issued this morning, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) noted that "distributors and vendors should only repackage and relabel a medical device at the direction of the sponsor, and with appropriate arrangements in place with the manufacturer of the device as stated on its label".

The TGA warned that people who fail to comply with these requirements and on-selling RATs could be breaking the law.

COVID-19 treatment gets TGA boost

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has granted a provisional determination to AstraZenca for its COVID-19 treatment, Evusheld (tixagevimab and cilgavimab), for use in adolescents and adults aged 12 years and older.

The move follows an initial determination for the prevention of COVID-19 in adults aged 18 years and older issued on 01 Nov 2021.

"This treatment consists of two monoclonal antibodies, tixagevimab and cilgavimab," the TGA said.

"These antibodies bind to the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 virus at two different sites.

"By attaching to the spike protein, the medicine is

expected to stop the virus from entering the body's cells and causing infection.

"The granting of a provisional determination means that the TGA has made a decision that AstraZeneca is now eligible to apply for provisional registration for Evusheld in the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG) in this age group.

"Evusheld is not intended to be used as a substitute for vaccination against COVID-19.

"In making its decision to grant AstraZeneca Pty Ltd a provisional determination, the TGA considered eligibility criteria, including factors such as evidence of a plan to submit comprehensive clinical data, and the seriousness of the current COVID-19 pandemic."

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ACCC's RAT pricing inquiry welcomed

THE Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC's) decision to monitor the pricing of rapid antigen test kits (RATs) is being welcomed by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia.

ACCC Chair, Rod Simms, announced it would be "examining claims that the current pricing levels of RATs are due to challenges in obtaining supplies", following more than 100 consumer complaints relating to the high costs of the products.

"We are seeking information from suppliers about their costs and the current pricing of rapid antigen tests," he said.

"We are also asking them about their current stock levels, and the amounts on order, and about their expectations about when additional tests may become readily available to consumers.

"We are also contacting major retailers and pharmacies seeking similar information and reminding

them that they need to be able to substantiate any claims they make to consumers about the reason for higher prices."

Simms said the ACCC "won't be shy to name and shame suppliers and retailers" who are deemed to be price gouging.

Responding to the announcement, Guild National President, Trent Twomey, described the ACCC's inquiry as "timely", but stressed it "must look at all levels of the supply chain, not just the retail level the consumer experiences".

"As someone who has ordered these tests for my own pharmacies, I am very aware that the cost to me as a pharmacy owner has escalated substantially over the past couple of months due to forces out of my control," he said.

"These increased costs are coming from wholesalers and distributors who in turn are facing increased prices for the product.

"They say their increased prices



are arising because of issues like express air freight and express delivery services around Australia.

"We are all crying out for product and getting it quickly comes at a cost.

"I am sympathetic to the increased costs wholesalers and distributors face and understand justifiable increased costs have to be passed on to the pharmacists and those other retailers who are selling the tests.

"These pharmacies and outlets in turn are passing the increased prices on.

"But all price rises along the whole supply chain must be passed on in a conscionable manner."

Sunburn risks

RESEARCHERS from the University of Sydney Pharmacy School are encouraging patients to speak to their pharmacists before sunning themselves to see if their medication may increase their risk of sunburn.

In an article published in *The Conversation*, the authors noted that some medicines can cause patients to have a light-activated reaction or enhance their body's UV absorption.

"It's important not to skim over the information provided with your medication, to speak to your pharmacist for on-the-spot advice and to take extra precautions if required," they said.

"They can confirm if your medicine does increase your risk of sunburn and discuss options."

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Dispensary Corner

WITH an election looming in three months' time, French President, Emmanuel Macron, is taking a novel approach, saying he deliberately wants to alienate roughly five million voters.

In an interview with *Le Parisien*, Macron outlined his strategy to boost the nation's COVID-19 vaccination rate, by irritating the unvaccinated.

"I really want to piss them off," he said.

"And so we will continue to do so, to the bitter end.

"That's the strategy... I am not going to put them in prison, I am not going to forcibly vaccinate them.

"Therefore you have to say to them: from 15 Jan you can no longer go to a restaurant, you can no longer go for a drink, you can no longer go for a coffee, you can no longer go to the theatre, you can no longer go to the cinema."

While Presidential rival, Marine Le Pen, criticised the comments saying Macron was "unworthy of his office" and wanted "to make the unvaccinated second-class citizens", his plan has struck a chord with voters, who described it as "very clever".

"The antivaxxers are a minority who piss off the majority," one voter said in a post on Twitter.

"The majority of vaccinated [people] hate the antivax [movement], he expresses out loud what the majority thinks softly."

With Australia facing an election it will be interesting to see if the Federal Government considers a similar tactic.

Pharmacists mourn great educator

PHARMACISTS across Australia are mourning the sudden passing of one of the profession's most universally liked and admired figures, Dr Erica Sainsbury.

The former University of Sydney Senior Lecturer in Pharmacy Practice, educated generations of pharmacists over the course of more than 30 years in the role.

In a post on LinkedIn outgoing Pharmacy Council of NSW member, Mike Anderson, described Sainsbury, who also served on the Council, as a friend and "one hell of a woman".

University of Sydney Dean of Pharmacy, Professor Andrew McLachlan, told *Pharmacy Daily* that Sainsbury had "a major impact on many careers".

"Erica was a pharmacy education leader who influenced many," he said.

"Erica is remembered by generations of pharmacists and pharmacy students as an

outstanding and passionate teacher who always put her students first.

"Of all the messages received by the School [of Pharmacy], most reflected the great efforts Erica made as a teacher - inspiring her students, and truly taking a student-centred approach to all she did."

Pharmacists' Support Service Executive Officer, Kay Dunkley, paid tribute to Sainsbury's contribution to the profession on LinkedIn, describing her passing as "a great loss to the pharmacy profession, but her work will live on in those who she taught, mentored and tutored".

"An inspiring pharmacist and educator," Dunkley added.

Pharmacy4Less CEO and University of Sydney Pharmacy Graduate, Feras Karem, noted that Sainsbury "made a huge contribution" to the industry.

"Her dedication to pharmacy will be missed," he said.

Alongside her roles as a lecturer,



and on the Pharmacy Council of NSW - a position she was due to step away from having decided not to stand for again last year (PD 03 Nov 2021), Sainsbury was on the current Australian Pharmacy Council (APC) Accreditation Committee.

Away from her pharmacy career, Sainsbury had a passion for cricket, and was the women's cricket ground announcer for both Cricket Australia and Cricket NSW for more than 16 years.

Tocilizumab supply improving: Roche

SHORTAGES of some tocilizumab products are set to continue, but the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has been advised by Roche Australia that supplies are improving.

In a statement issued by the TGA late last month, the regulator reported that "subcutaneous tocilizumab will be building to normal supply in early 2022, however, access to either subcutaneous products (ACTPen and pre-filled syringe) may still fluctuate".

"To ensure patients have continual access to subcutaneous tocilizumab (Actemra) as supply returns, we have extended the



Serious Scarcity Substitution Instrument (SSSI) to 30 Apr," the regulator said.

"As supply is still unstable, in line with advice from the Australian Rheumatology Association, it is recommended that no new patients are initiated on subcutaneous tocilizumab at this time unless alternate therapy is not appropriate."

MYO workshop

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) will host a Meeting Your Obligations (MYO) workshop for small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in Brisbane on 03 Mar.

The event will be open to delegates to attend in person and online, to assist SMEs to navigate "the regulatory maze" relating to therapeutic goods regulation.

The TGA will cover the basics of regulation and case studies, with the event also featuring a Q&A session with staff from the regulator to give delegates the opportunity to ask questions.