

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features two pages of news.

Safety update

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has announced that the product information (PI) for tenofovir alafenamide is being updated to include a warning about renal adverse effects.

In a statement released today, the TGA said 14 cases of renal adverse events related to the medication had been reported as of 07 Dec.

"Health professionals should be aware of predisposing risk factors for these adverse effects and monitor patients appropriately," the TGA said.

The regulator noted that the antiviral nucleoside analogue has been marketed under a number of brands in Australia, including as a monotherapy, Vemlidy, and as part of fixed dose combination products, such as, Biktarvy, Genvoya, Odefsey, Symtuza and Descovy.

CLICK HERE for more.

Guild backs concession card RATs

PLANS to distribute free COVID-19 rapid antigen test kits (RATs) to concession card holders to ease pressure on current testing facilities is being welcomed by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia.

The move, announced by Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, yesterday, will give eligible patients access to up to 10 RATs over a three-month period, with patients able to receive a maximum of five tests in a month.

Guild National President, Trent Twomey, said the planned RAT rollout through the community pharmacy network reflected recognition of pharmacists' skills and accessibility.

"As the Prime Minister has announced, he has discussed this proposal with me," Twomey said.

"The objective is to deliver a maximum of 10 tests that will be provided to concessional card holders over three months.

"This is not a service for people who are COVID-symptomatic or who are close contacts. Those people should attend a testing centre for their free test."

Twomey said the program would be a massive logistical exercise



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with free RATs to be distributed to approximately 6.6 million Australians including those with Department of Veteran Affairs Gold or White cards, and holders of Commonwealth Seniors Health Cards, low income, pension concession and healthcare cards. He added that community pharmacies were the logical distribution points for the federally-funded RATs.

"As the Prime Minister makes clear, pharmacies are where we have the systems in place to provide those tests," Twomey said.

MEANWHILE, Twomey also

voiced support for RAT rationing measures to ensure equitable access to the test for those not eligible for the government-funded products.

"We are working with the Commonwealth through the National Co-ordination Mechanism to implement a voluntary code, which will place limits on RATs at point of sale," he said.

"This is similar to the voluntary practices which were put in place at the start of the pandemic in 2020 in consultation with the Therapeutic Goods Administration regarding rationing of salbutamol and paracetamol."

Victoria to introduce RAT requirements

FROM midnight today patients in Victoria who return a positive COVID-19 rapid antigen test (RAT) will be required to report their status to the State Department of Health.

Under changes to pandemic health orders announced by Victorian Health Minister, Martin Foley, people with positive RAT results will be considered as "probable" cases.

Patients will be required to fill out an online form or call the Department directly under the new measures, which will enable them to claim isolation payments and access treatment if their symptoms become more severe.

"What is clear is that we are in a new phase of this pandemic, and a new phase of how we

need to respond," Foley said.

"The strategies of the last two years have served us very well in regards to those earlier variants.

"We need, and are, indeed, changing to a whole heap of other new approaches when it comes to how we respond to the Omicron variant.

"Today I will be signing pandemic orders that recognise people with a (positive) rapid antigen test as a probable case, as a new description in the pandemic orders.

"What it will mean is essentially they will have precisely the same obligations and the same rights as someone — whether it be for clinical support, financial support, from both the State or the Commonwealth."

SHPA pushes for free COVID-19 RATs

WITH COVID-19 case numbers rising across the country, the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is joining other healthcare bodies in calling for rapid antigen test kits (RATs) to be made freely available.

SHPA CEO, Kristen Michaels, said that increasing accessibility to RATs was "sound policy" that would help limit hospitalisations and pressure on PCR testing capacity.

"With the explosion in case numbers in every state and territory, bar Western Australia, the power and importance of rapid antigen tests as part of our public health response has also quickly increased," she said.

"If freely available to everyone at such a critical time, rapid test results can guide many

more Australians in considering whether they truly require a PCR test or can follow direct and clear advice to self-manage symptoms at home and, most importantly, encourage as many as possible to reduce their movements and limit the risk of transmitting the virus to others.

"At a minimum, rapid antigen tests should be prioritised for the most at-risk population groups, such as residential aged care facility residents and workers, hospital workers, the immunocompromised and Australians living with a disability.

"In recent days, SHPA has heard from various Hospital Pharmacists who have been unable to access a rapid antigen test along with their hospital colleagues."

COVID stretching workforce capacity

PHARMACY workers have seen summer holiday plans shelved as surging COVID-19 case numbers puts increasing pressure on staffing levels.

Speaking on the ABC's 7.30 program last night, Pharmacy Guild of Australia NSW Committee Member, Catherine Bronger, said that Sydney's latest outbreak had forced her to abandon a family getaway and recall staff from annual leave to fill gaps in rosters caused by colleagues impacted by testing delays.

"It has been extraordinary," he said.

"On a day-to-day basis [I'm] getting four or five text messages from different staff members saying they are unable to work.

"That's cause a huge dent in our workforce - 20 to 30% since Christmas.

"We were seeing pharmacists who weren't getting their [PCR test] results for seven days... and that's after their isolation period.

"How do you then ensure the pharmacist can get back to work?"



"We've actually had to bring back so many of our staff from annual leave - I myself was up at the coast finally getting a bit of family time... just to help out."

With rising demand for pharmacy services, COVID-19 vaccinations and elusive rapid antigen test kits, Bronger said her team was being stretched.

"I haven't enough staff to even serve the customers from the floor properly, let alone answer the hundreds of hundreds of phone calls a day that we're getting," she said.

Speaking with **Pharmacy Daily**, Guild NSW Branch President, David Heffernan, echoed Bronger's concerns about staffing and warned that under current requirements the pharmacy workforce was being pushed to its limits.

"Let's face it, we can't do telehealth, because we deal with the tangibles in health," he said.

"People will come through the pharmacy that are positive and we're seeing pharmacy assistants and pharmacy staff testing positive all over the place... and at the moment we're stretched."



Dispensary Corner

AFTER making questionable claims about the side-effects of COVID-19 vaccines on her cousin's friend's junk (*PD* 15 Sep 2021), you might expect rapper, Nicki Minaj, to be low on the list of idols for health professionals.

However, British pharmacist and vaccine skeptic, Navid Sole, proudly remains a "superfan" ahead of his debut appearance on the UK's edition of *The Apprentice* this week.

The 27-year-old is looking to kick-start his pharmacy business by attracting the support of the show's pro-vaccination boss, Lord Alan Sugar, with his business skills.

In a post on Instagram earlier this week, Sole revealed he had been chosen as one of 16 candidates vying for an investment of close to \$500,000, to create a new pharmacy business.

While Sole is keen for the cash injection, in a deleted tweet responding to Minaj's debunked post, he said he was "against the vaccine", but was "too scared to say anything" for fear of losing his professional registration.

To secure the cash and Sugar's expertise, Sole will have to demonstrate he has received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, and see off the challenges of boutique cocktail bar owner, Sophie Wilding - who reportedly has "a witch school qualification", and former Irish professional rugby player-turned sales executive, Conor Gilsenan, among others.

Fines for RAT non-compliance

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has warned that it will investigate "any incidents that it becomes aware of where retailers of COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RATs) have repackaged these tests" for sale, in breach of the *Therapeutic Goods Act 1989*.

Contraventions of the Act could result in fines of \$888,000 for individuals or \$4.44 million for corporations, or significant civil penalties.

[CLICK HERE](#) for more.

Pharmacy walk-in testing hurts deli

MOVES to roll out COVID-19 testing services through a pharmacy in the US state of Rhode Island are having an adverse effect on local businesses, *NBC 10 News* reports.

Deli-owner, Kimberly Paquette, told the broadcaster that trade had plunged by 65% since the neighbouring, Atwood Pharmacy, launched its walk-in testing service.

Paquette, who took over the Schroder's Deli and Catering business after being forced



to close her family's previous business due to COVID-19 struggles, said that the volume of people lining up to go into the pharmacy for tests had made her customers too nervous to come in.