

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news.

Omicron hitting workforce: SHPA

FRONTLINE health workers need urgent access to COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RATs) with rising numbers of positive cases amongst hospital workers heaping pressure on capacity, the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA), warns.

SHPA CEO, Kristen Michaels, said State and Federal Governments needed to ensure frontline workers, including hospital pharmacists, are working when they are healthy, and isolating when infected, to keep hospitals running at maximum capacity.

"SHPA members report that pharmacy departments are coping with the highest ever number of staff unable to work – in some cases up to 30% – due to being positive with COVID-19 or isolating as a close contact," she said.

"Ensuring hospital pharmacists have greater access to RATs will help reduce reliance on the broad caution that can see staff at home when they are COVID-negative and available to work."

Michaels welcomed moves to boost the supply of RATs across the country, but stressed that the "distribution effort must include hospital pharmacists, who continue to report a lack of access to tests".

She added that protecting health workers was critical, as infection rates rise.

COVAX out-reach needs stock, staff

PLANS to roll out COVID-19 vaccines (COVAX) to children aged five to 11 years in schools through a pharmacy and general practice out-reach program will require primary care providers to receive appropriate supplies, Pharmacy Guild of Australia Victorian Branch President, Anthony Tassone, says.

Following the launch of the Victorian State Government's Primary Care Vaccinations in Schools program yesterday, Tassone told *Pharmacy Daily* that securing appropriate staffing levels and doses of the children's version of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine would be key challenges for those looking to provide in-school services.

Under the scheme successful applicants will receive up to \$6,500 to cover staffing, travel and equipment costs, with an additional \$5,000 clinic establishment fee for each school, with additional loadings for specialist schools and schools in rural and regional areas.

Tassone said the scheme was "great news for families looking to have their children protected against COVID-19".

"The grants will provide another opportunity for pharmacies to expand their service offering to



reach more eligible five to 11-year-old patients to receive a vaccination in a familiar setting to them, being their school," he said.

"Whilst the Guild welcomes this initiative from the Victorian government we have raised with the Victorian Department of Health the challenges that pharmacies are currently facing in receiving sufficient vaccine stock to meet demand and having the workforce available to be able to provide out-reach services.

"We are pleased that the Victorian government has made this investment on the back of the primary care enhancement grants that were awarded over the New Year period to expand COVID-19 vaccination services in pharmacies and general practice.

"Whilst the COVID-19 vaccination in community pharmacy program

is a Federal Government initiative – we applaud the Victorian Government for engaging with primary care to explore opportunities to help encourage as much uptake as possible."

As part of the program Victorian pharmacies will be asked to nominate a local government area and number of schools and students they can help vaccinate, with successful applicants paired with schools in priority areas.



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Guild seeks consistency on COVAX

REPRESENTATIVES of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia are urging National Cabinet to implement consistent rules authorising the pharmacy workforce to administer COVID-19 vaccinations (COVAX).

In a letter sent to Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, and the State and Territory Premiers and Chief Ministers on 29 Dec 2021 (which was shared with *Pharmacy Daily* today), the Guild called on National Cabinet to support pharmacies to “effectively, efficiently and sustainably continue to meet the demand of the COVAX rollout across Australia”, by optimising the use of the sector’s workforce.

The Guild noted that pharmacies were being inundated with patients seeking booster shots, while also preparing for the rollout of the children’s vaccine and maintaining their core role of medicine supply.

“Authorisation of pharmacy immunisers for COVID-19 vaccines must be made nationally consistent in the regulations of all jurisdictions,” the letter co-signed by Guild National President, Trent Twomey, and the presidents of the organisation’s eight branches, said. “Currently each State and

Territory provide its own authorisations of who is eligible to administer vaccines in or from community pharmacies, and the supervision arrangements if required.

“Some jurisdictions have limited vaccine administration to pharmacist immunisers, whereas others have acknowledged the competency and skills of the entire community pharmacy workforce to contribute according to their training and professional scope.

“Queensland community pharmacies have the broadest authorisation to utilise their entire workforce and should be used as the gold standard in harmonising regulations.

“General and provisionally registered pharmacists (interns), and pharmacy students who have completed the required training and qualifications are able to administer the COVID-19 vaccine.

“Interns and pharmacy students must be supervised by pharmacist immunisers, although this may be indirect following the pharmacist’s assessment and comfort with the individual’s competency to administer appropriately.

“Queensland pharmacy



assistants are also authorised to contribute to the vaccination service by undertaking technical tasks including the receipt of vaccines, preparation of doses, and appropriate disposal.

“On behalf of community pharmacies, we offer you our every assistance to leverage community pharmacy’s unique position to get Australia vaccinated against COVID-19 and ask that National Cabinet take immediate action to align authorisation for the pharmacy workforce with the arrangements in Queensland in order to ensure all available and trained pharmacists, interns, students and pharmacy assistants can contribute within their scope to administer all COVID-19 vaccines.”

Distribution of PPE needs boost

MANY Primary Health Networks have yet to distribute personal protective equipment (PPE) to pharmacies involved in the COVID-19 vaccination rollout, Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, says.

Speaking on *Sky News* yesterday Twomey, voiced his frustration at delays in delivering long-promised PPE to stores across the country.

“My pharmacies in Far North Queensland only received the form to order PPE over the weekend,” he said.

“So I’ve now placed those orders, but not one of my pharmacies have received stock.

“The community pharmacy network is just as critical as the GP network... so we need to make sure not only do we have enough masks, but also enough eye protection [which are required under infectious diseases guidelines]... and at the moment there’s a lack of that coming through.”

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Drunk knife-wielding robber sentenced

CANBERRAN pharmacy bandit, Jake Tony Walden, has been sentenced to three years and 11 months jail, after being convicted of robbing the same pharmacy twice in a matter of weeks in 2020.

The ACT Supreme Court heard that the 26-year-old was “really drunk” when he cycled to the pharmacy, armed with a 10 cm folding knife, which he used to

threaten staff while demanding oxyocodone and Valium.

The Court was told Walden’s family used the pharmacy, and that during the first robbery on 01 Aug 2020, he made no attempt to disguise himself, but wore a mask the second time.

Sentencing Walden, Acting Justice, Richard Refshauge, said his crimes demonstrated “ineptitude and opportunism”.

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Dispensary Corner

ANTI-VACCINATION

proponents citing “ethical” concerns around the use of COVID-19 shots need to rethink their values, World Health Organization (WHO) Emergencies Program Executive Director, Dr Mike Ryan, believes.

Speaking during a press conference earlier this week, the Irishman said acceptance of vaccination was not a “moral grey area”.

“Please remember this isn’t an individual moral issue,” he said.

“If you’re offered a vaccine, take the vaccine.

“If you’re offered a second vaccine, take the vaccine.

“If you’re offered a booster, take the booster.

“No individual on this planet should feel they’re the ones in a moral grey zone.

“If you’re offered the vaccine, take it.”

Ryan added that humanity’s real ethical conundrum relating to the vaccine was not whether or not people should take it, but to boost vaccine equity.

He noted that more than three billion people around the globe have yet to be offered a single dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

“If we can’t address the simple issue of the equity of every individual on the planet having access to a protective course of vaccine against a pandemic – if we can’t do that – how in God’s name are we likely to deal with the bigger issues of climate justice and social justice that we face in the world?” he asked.

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