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Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news, plus a full page from TerryWhite Chemmart.

Free RATs for all problematic

NATIONAL Cabinet's decision not to make COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RATs) free to all Australians is being backed by the Business Council of Australia (BCA).

Speaking on ABC Radio National this morning, BCA President, Tim Reed, said moves to extend subsidised RATs beyond concession cardholders would "distort many components of the market", and create distribution and supply challenges.

"Pharmacies and business won't stock them if they're free," he said.

Pharmacies top for RAT complaints

COMMUNITY pharmacies account for almost 50% of complaints about alleged price gouging related to COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RATs), data from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) reveals.

In a statement released this morning the consumer watchdog said it had contacted more than 40 test suppliers, major retailers and pharmacy groups "seeking information about their costs, current pricing, and stock availability, and reminding them they need to be able to substantiate any claims they make to consumers about the reasons for higher prices".

Between 25 Dec 2021 and 12 Jan, the ACCC received more than 1,800 complaints about RAT pricing, with pharmacies accounting for 879 complaints - more than any other retail group.

ACCC Chair, Rod Sims, noted that the regulator's inquiry to date had found that wholesale costs for RATs

were between \$3.95 and \$11.45 per test, while average retail prices have increased to "around \$24" since 07 Jan, while complaints about tests costing \$100 each have also been reported.

"In the middle of a significant outbreak of COVID-19 in a pandemic, the excessive pricing of rapid antigen tests required to diagnose the illness and protect other members of the public, is of significant concern to the ACCC," he said.

"Only a few weeks ago tests were readily available at most chemists and supermarkets for around \$10 for a single test.

"We realise demand and supply chain issues have impacted since then, but our initial research suggests that a price of around \$20 per test or more, however packaged, may be hard to justify based on the average wholesale costs and such retailers should explain why the price is so high.

"Any test costing more than \$30,



even with supply constraints, is almost certainly too expensive and would seem to be taking advantage of the current circumstances."

Simms added that the ACCC has received reports about retailers, including pharmacies, refusing to provide receipts to customers who have purchased RATs, or that the receipts have listed the test as another item, with at least one convenience store recording them as a "sandwich", while other stores have been demanding the customers pay in cash.

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Rural pharmacies voice COVID fears

PHARMACISTS operating in rural and remote areas are warning that patients' access to medicines could be cut off if they are exposed to COVID-19.

Rural Pharmacy Network of Australia (RPNA) Coordinator, Katie Stott, who manages the only pharmacy in Dover, Tasmania, with Pharmacy Guild of Australia Tasmania Branch Committee Member, Fred Hellqvist, told The Guardian that they were "terrified" of catching the virus and having to temporarily close the store.

"If we had to close for seven days or more I'm really scared," she said. "We just don't have a lot of backup. A lot of these bigger pharmacies [are] operating A and B teams."

"They can bring a fresh team in that haven't had contact with the other team if someone gets sick. "We've just been praying it won't happen but with Omicron it just seems like an inevitability that rural pharmacies are going to get hit."

"I can just anticipate that it will be absolutely chaotic if we have to close for more than a day. "We'll probably end up in a situation where people are calling triple-0 unnecessarily or going up to the doctor's surgery."

Stott said that since the start of the pandemic the RPNA has been warning the Federal Government that there needs to be a contingency plan to ensure ongoing access to medicines in the event that pharmacies have to close due to COVID-19.

However the organisation said it has yet to receive any pledge of support from Federal or State governments.



Stott said there were two main challenges facing rural pharmacy owners in the event that they contract COVID-19, with accessing locum pharmacists already proving to be "a nightmare".

"A, it's getting a locum in the first place to keep the doors open, and B, it's the cost of that locum ... the hourly rate that they'll be expecting to come into a pharmacy last minute, into potentially where there's an outbreak of Covid, they can demand a pretty hefty rate and that's not easy for a small pharmacy like ours to deal with," she said.

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APP earlybird closes next week

PHARMACISTS planning on attending this year's Australian Pharmacy Professional Conference (APP) have until 11.59pm (AEST) next Mon to secure a \$120 earlybird discount.

Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, described the event as "the perfect setting for attendees to refresh their knowledge, reconnect with your colleagues and peers, and view the latest industry innovations and product developments".

"Attendees can refresh their knowledge with sessions tailored to appeal to owners, pharmacists, administrative staff, pharmacy managers and pharmacy assistants," he said.

Event organisers are offering delegates a 100% refund should they be unable to attend to do COVID-19 restrictions.

CLICK HERE to register.

Kids with asthma need COVAX now

PARENTS and carers of children with asthma are being urged to get them their first COVID-19 vaccination (COVAX) before the school year starts, to limit their risk of becoming seriously ill.

National Asthma Council Australia (NACA) Guidelines Committee Member, Dr Louisa Owens, said that with case numbers rising over the summer holiday period, it was important for eligible children to get vaccinated.

"Australia's COVID-19 vaccination program opened up to children aged five to 11 years from 10 Jan and we are urging parents and carers of children with asthma to get their child vaccinated as soon as possible," she said.

"If parents are unsure about getting their child with asthma vaccinated, then we encourage them to make an appointment with their GP and have a discussion before their child starts the 2022 school year."

In a statement released by the NACA today, the organisation noted that while data from 2020 showed that while most children who presented a tertiary hospitals in Australia with COVID-19 experienced mild disease, respiratory conditions were the leading comorbidity amongst positive children.

The NACA also advised parents and carers of children with asthma to schedule a check-up with their health provider ahead of the new school year, adding they should share a copy of the child's latest asthma action plan with their school and any after school careers.

The organisation also recommended that all family members living with children with asthma get their flu shot.

Medlab to work on nasal mRNA COVAX

AUSTRALIAN Securities Exchange (ASX) listed company, Medlab Clinical, has secured a research grant to develop a "no-jab" vaccine solution for COVID-19 vaccinations (COVAX).

The company will collaborate with researchers from the University of NSW and Macquarie University to develop

a proof of concept non-invasive nasal delivered vaccine using its patented NanoCelle technology.

Medlab CEO, Sean Hall, said the company was "thrilled" to be part of the research program.

"The ability to prove efficacious delivery of vaccines without the 'jab' is a serious game-changer to modern medicine," he said.

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Dispensary Corner

SINCE the dawn of time people have been going to extraordinary lengths to make themselves look more attractive.

However, British research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that no amount of time spent applying cosmetics, or sculpting that hipster beard can compete with a protective facemask when it comes to making someone more desirable.

The authors, from the University of Cardiff, conducted an initial assessment in Feb 2021, recruiting 43 women to run their eyes over a series of pictures of men with and without face coverings.

Participants overwhelmingly reported that the images of the men with the bottom half of their faces obscured were significantly sexier.

"The results run counter to the pre-pandemic research where it was thought masks made people think about disease and the person should be avoided," the authors said.

"The pandemic has changed our psychology in how we perceive the wearers of masks. When we see someone wearing a mask we no longer think 'that person has a disease, I need to stay away'."

In a blow for the environment, the research found blue disposable masks were the most alluring.

It is not known if the results were skewed by the unmasked men having particularly terrible teeth or wonky noses.

Keep pharmacies open

ALL community pharmacy employees need to be exempted from COVID-19 isolation requirements if they return negative tests to ensure stores can remain open, Pharmacy Guild of Australia Victorian Branch President, Anthony Tassone, believes.

Speaking on 3AW this morning, Tassone called on the Victorian State Government to make sure that exemptions are extended to allow pharmacists and pharmacy assistants "to return to work safely and responsibly if they've tested negative and are asymptomatic", to combat workforce shortages.

"We've got to keep the doors open to pharmacies," he said.

"We've got to make sure people can get their medicines, get their booster vaccinations and get what they need."

Tassone also discussed the planned rollout of Government-funded rapid antigen tests (RATs) for concession and pension cardholders, which is due to start



next week.

However, Tassone noted that "RATs themselves are extremely hard to come by".

"Most pharmacies that I speak to do not have stock and aren't absolutely sure when they will be getting stock," he said.

"Most pharmacies don't expect to have stock for day one of that Government-subsidised program, but hope to have some at the very end of Jan or early Feb."

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Weekly Comment

Welcome to Pharmacy Daily's weekly comment feature. This week's contributor is **Amit Saha, M-Pharm, MBA, MPS group technical manager, LaCorium Health.**



Magnesium myth.

"IT IS unlikely that magnesium supplementation provides clinically meaningful cramp prophylaxis to older adults experiencing skeletal muscle cramps". Those are not my words, they are taken directly from the author's conclusion section of a Cochrane review on Magnesium for skeletal muscle cramps (Garrison et al, Sept 2020).

Despite this, many of us in pharmacy continue recommending magnesium supplements for the relief and prophylaxis of muscle cramps despite the fact that it unlikely to have any clinical significance.

The exact cause of skeletal muscle cramps is hard to ascertain, as such a multi-combination therapy as opposed to a singular ingredient approach is likely to be more successful. A treatment plan which combines magnesium with an antispasmodic such as viburnum opulus, a circulation booster and few essential B vitamins has a greater likelihood of achieving a better clinical outcome in the treatment and prophylaxis of skeletal muscle cramping than just Magnesium alone.

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