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Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features four pages of news.

RAT reviews

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has confirmed a review of all COVID-19-specific laboratory antigen tests and rapid antigen tests (RATs), including point-of-care and self-tests, which are included in the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods.

The review aims to determine if the tests have been impacted by the current known variants of SARS-CoV-2, with ongoing activity to assess their ability to detect emerging variants of COVID-19.

The TGA noted that as each Variant of Concern (VoC) emerges, manufacturers are expected to undertake analysis to ensure their tests continue to perform as intended.

Scope expansion must continue

LEAPS forward in pharmacists' scope of practice made during the COVID-19 pandemic must continue, Federal Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Emma McBride, believes.

Speaking at the Pharmacy Guild of Australia NSW Branch Dinner in Sydney last night, the pharmacist-turned-politician, said the pandemic has highlighted the benefits pharmacists can deliver.

"Those of us in the room have always known the critical role pharmacists play in whatever setting, but I think what people have seen throughout the pandemic is how integral that is and how that underpins the health and wellbeing of so many Australians," she said.

"As a pharmacist myself, something I'm really passionate about [is] for us to be able to reach the top end of our scope of practice.

"We've seen leaps forward during the pandemic and this must be

continued, and this progression has to continue.

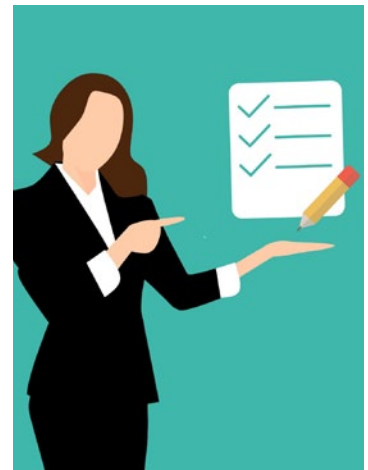
"When I first started working as a pharmacist we were often defined by the setting we work in... [now] we're really seeing that pharmacists are not being defined by the setting they work in, or the building that we're working in.

"Increasingly pharmacists are working across settings and to the top of their scope of practice, using all their skills, training and expertise alongside GPs, nurses and other allied health professionals.

"And what we're really seeing is the benefit in patient care, the benefits in outcomes and the benefits to our Budget.

"It is something that I have tried through my role to continue to advocate for, and hopefully now in Government we'll be able to really progress."

MEANWHILE, McBride took the opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of NSW Health Minister, Brad Hazzard - who also addressed



the event - during the pandemic. "It's extraordinary what you have done in Australia's biggest state, and your leadership across the nation as well, it really made a difference," she said.

"You made people feel safe and feel reassured, and that's real leadership, so on behalf of myself and the incoming Federal Government, thank you."

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Hazzard backs pharmacists to deliver

SUGGESTIONS that community pharmacists lack the skills to provide more services to patients no longer hold water with NSW Health Minister, Brad Hazzard, with the profession delivering for the State throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hazzard told delegates at the Pharmacy Guild of Australia NSW Branch Dinner last night, that the pandemic had highlighted “the natural capacity of community pharmacists to do so much for the community”.

“We all know there’s always a challenge of GPs not necessarily wanting pharmacists to do that extra [bit of healthcare] that they can do,” he said.

“[But] COVID has made it really clear that pharmacists can do it.

“I remember sitting with Dr [Kerry] Chant and I was getting frustrated about the spread, or lack thereof, of GPs, and [trying to work out] how are we going to get there vaccines into arms - when the vaccines finally showed up.

“And when I asked the question ‘what about pharmacists, where are they?’ we looked at the map and there are 1,200 pharmacies that could do the job in some of the remote parts of the State.”



Hazzard added that the broader pharmacy industry has been key to the State Government’s COVID-19 response.

“I want to thank all the pharmacists and all of the team who actually supply the pharmacies, because quite simply NSW could not have done what we did without you,” he said.

“I know the Victorian Health Minister, Martin Foley and Yvette D’Ath in Queensland - the three biggest states - we’ve had discussions about it and we all really get the fact that community

pharmacists are very much at the forefront.”

Hazzard also noted that community pharmacies have played a key role in the rollout of influenza vaccinations this year, with more than 500,000 doses administered through NSW-based stores under the State Government’s free flu shot campaign this month.

Under the campaign pharmacist immunisers in NSW can administer free flu shots to patients aged five years and older until the end of Jun.

Pharmacists key to iron deficiency

THE International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) has published a new report from an international advisory roundtable aiming to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the role of pharmacists in iron deficiency anaemia.

Frontline pharmacists, policy experts, educators and researchers gathered in May this year, with the support of FIP member organisations and the FIP Community Pharmacy Section.

Participants indicated there were many ways in which pharmacists could contribute to helping with anaemia management, with many noting that the condition’s prevalence was likely to be underdiagnosed in the community setting.

“Therefore, screening for early detection of anaemia in community practice is encouraged, and this is where the role of pharmacists and pharmacies is crucial,” the report said - see fip.org.

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Epileptics update

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has issued a Medicines Safety Update advising of new precautions for pregnancy and women of childbearing potential relating to antiepileptic medicines.

The changes bring the Product Information for pneytoin, phenobabital, primidone and zonisamide into line with other antiepileptic medicines, with the updates aiming to raise awareness of “essential preconception care”.

The medicines should not be prescribed for pregnant patients unless it is clearly necessary, with potential benefits required to justify the risk to the developing fetus after careful consideration of alternative treatment options.

Women of childbearing potential are also advised to use effective contraception during treatment - [tga.gov.au](https://www.tga.gov.au).

Govt to boost antiviral awareness

AUSTRALIANS are being urged to check if they are eligible for oral COVID-19 antiviral treatments, as part of a Federal Government-funded campaign.

Health Minister, Mark Butler, announced the \$11 million program to encourage people to get vaccinated for both COVID-19 and influenza this winter, and promote the availability of prescription medications, Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir/ritonavir) and Lagevrio (molnupiravir) through community pharmacies.

“More than 1.3 million courses of antivirals have been purchased by the Government to help protect people who remain at risk of progressing to severe illness from the virus, even when up to date with their vaccinations,” the Department said.

“While most of us will only experience mild symptoms, for older Australians and those with some underlying medical conditions antiviral treatments



can be effective, often preventing hospitalisation.

“One of the big advantages of these drugs is that they can be taken at home.

“However, timing is critical. COVID-19 can move from mild to severe illness very quickly.

“It’s vital to start the five-day antiviral treatment course when symptoms first appear.

“People are encouraged to check

if they are eligible for an antiviral treatment and discuss options with their doctor.”

Minister Butler added that with both COVID-19 and influenza circulating in the community this winter, it was critical that people ensure they are up to date with the COVID-19 boosters, and make an appointment to have a flu shot if they have yet to get one this year.

FOR ADULTS 60 YEARS AND OVER, SEVERAL INFLUENZA VACCINE OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE

Your state health department can provide you with up-to-date information on any cost reimbursement that may be available.

It’s important to discuss influenza protection and vaccine options with your older patients.



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RACGP Directors face vote to get paid

DIRECTORS of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) could go unpaid for the next five months if its members do not back a resolution at an emergency general meeting (EGM) next week.

RACGP Vice President, Bruce Willett, told *Australian Doctor* that the issue was caused by confusion over plans to restructure the directors' pay in line with the financial year, rather than the organisation's annual general meeting (AGM).

The publication reported that members voted against the resolution at last year's AGM on the misunderstanding that the Board was attempting to double its pay.

"I think some people saw two payments and thought we would be doubling our remuneration," Willett said.

"When the result of the vote



came back, there was surprise."

Tue's EGM will ask GPs to back a \$1.2 million remuneration package for the College's 14 Directors, including President, Dr Karen Price.

Under the Board's current remuneration structure RACGP Directors receive a base of \$40,000, plus additional payments, with the Chair earning \$110,000, while the College President is paid approximately \$255,000.

In its explanatory notice to

members the RACGP said that of the \$1.2 million package, less than \$990,000 will be paid to the 14 Directors, with the remaining funds being held as "contingency" for new activities "such as co-opting a Director for the new RACGP Northern Territory faculty".

"If it fails, we don't get paid for at least five months; it's as simple as that," Willett said.

"It wouldn't be ideal, but I would still do the job."



Dispensary Corner

SUSTAINABILITY is becoming a watchword, with everyone encouraged to recycle and reuse.

So it's no surprise that crematoria in the Netherlands have developed a lucrative sideline in rare metals retrieved from bodily implants such as artificial joints and metal pins.

Dutch broadcaster *NOS* says the proceeds generally go to charity, with soaring prices for raw materials meaning recycling is raising significant funds.

A report cites a spokesperson for the National Crematoria Association saying other metals collected sometimes include items such as scissors and clamps which are left in place when a patient sadly dies during an operation.

On average each cremation yields about €30 worth of metal.

PIGS are sometimes used to sniff out truffles, but porcine powers seem to have uncovered something else in an Italian forest.

Police investigating a drug smuggling operation in Tuscany have confirmed overhearing suspects complaining about wild boars discovering and destroying a stash of cocaine.

With an estimated worth of about €20,000, the 4kg haul was apparently dug up by the curious creatures and dispersed throughout the woods.

It's the latest in a rising tide of complaints about the country's escalating wild boar population, which has also been blamed for a spate of road accidents and damage to farm property.

CEO Sleepout success for Sigma pair

SIGMA Healthcare Chief Commercial Officer, Jeff Sells, and Head of Guardian Pharmacy, Kurt O'Brien, both surpassed fundraising targets for last night Vinnies CEO Sleepout.

The Melbourne-based duo raised a combined \$17,573, to support homeless Australians, by roughing it at Port Melbourne's Timber Works.

Over the last four years Sells and O'Brien's efforts have brought in close to \$40,000 for the charity, with funds from this year's campaign set to be used to provide almost 600 meals, more than 140 beds and 55 individual support programs.

Nationally the event has raised



more than \$9 million dollars, with 1,479 executives foregoing home comforts on one of the coldest and longest nights of the year.

Pictured, Sigma CCO, Jeff Sells, with Guardian Pharmacy boss, Kurt O'Brien, at the CEO Sleepout.

Novavax tick

THE European Medicines Agency's (EMA) medicines committee has recommended granting an extension of the indication for the Nuvaxovid COVID-19 vaccine for use in adolescents aged 12-17 years.

The Novavax-developed immunisation is already approved in Europe for use in adults aged 18 and above.

The use of the vaccine in adolescents is the same as in adults, with two intramuscular injections given three weeks apart, the EMA said.

A study including over 2,200 children is being carried out in accordance with the vaccine's paediatric investigation plan.