

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features four pages of news.

New COVID vaccine variant

THE TGA today announced provisional approval of a new Pfizer bivalent COVID-19 vaccine.

Cominarty Original/Omicron BA1 (tozinameran and riltozinameran) has been given the tick for use as a booster dose in adults 18 years and up.

The TGA said it had "carefully considered data from an ongoing clinical study" in making the decision, finding the new jab elicited a superior neutralising antibody response against Omicron BA1 strain and a similar response against the ancestral strain of the virus, while studies assessing activity against the BA4/5 subvariants are ongoing.

Pocock tackles ORT dispensing fees

FEDERAL Minister for Health and Aged Care, Mark Butler, will be required to complete a review of the opioid replacement treatment (ORT) program by 01 Jul, under an amendment to the *National Health Amendment (General Co-payment) Bill 2022*.

The legislation was passed into law yesterday with an attached amendment from former Wallaby captain-turned-politician, David Pocock, aimed at tackling out-of-pocket costs being incurred by patients seeking to access ORT.

Addressing the Senate on Wed, Pocock noted that Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) safety-net protections have been removed for ORT, under a non-legislative special arrangement, despite some of the medications being PBS-listed, creating significant out-of-pocket costs for patients.

"There's no rationale for this," he said.

"People accessing opioid dependence treatments are also

subject to cost-of-living pressures, including rising healthcare costs.

"It is bad policy at best and discrimination at worst to remove a nationally guaranteed protection for a group of people living with addiction disorder."

Pocock noted that current arrangements compel pharmacists to charge private dispensing fees for ORT, while costs associated with prescription opioids were covered by the PBS.

"In that regard, the cost of the poison can be cheaper than their treatment," he said.

"This special arrangement has baked in a financial disincentive for people to start treatment.

"This arrangement also negatively impacts community pharmacies.

"These are small businesses that have to make decisions to accrue debt in the interests of providing good health care, and that's exactly what they're doing across the country.



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"In a survey of pharmacies in NSW and Victoria, over 70% reported that they were providing credit - often bad credit - to patients who are unable to pay their dispensing fees.

"While it speaks to the integrity of our healthcare providers that they are willing to make these decisions, they shouldn't have to."

A spokesperson for Pocock told **Pharmacy Daily** that the amendment would ensure Parliament could scrutinise future arrangements for ORT programs, and get rid of private dispensing fees.



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GuildLink acquisition delivers for MDR

MEDADVISOR'S (MDR's) takeover of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia's GuildLink business is fuelling immediate revenue growth.

In a market update, MDR revealed that its Australian revenue increased by 38.1% to \$4.5 million, in the first quarter of the 2023 financial year, following its acquisition of GuildLink in Jul (**PD** 25 Jul).

The company reported that excluding GuildLink underlying revenue for the quarter ending 30 Sep was up by 3.6%.

MDR noted that "the integration of GuildLink is progressing well and to plan, focused on transitioning customers and enhancing the functionality of the MedAdvisor Plus One platform".

"Gross margin was 81.8% for 1Q FY23, broadly in-line with the prior corresponding period, and is expected to improve once the GuildCare platform has been integrated towards the end of FY23," the company said.

The Australian Securities Exchange (ASX) update also noted that the acquisition of GuildLink was funded by way of a placement of 15% of the fully paid ordinary shares in MDR to Guild Group, with \$0.7 million paid in relation



to acquisition related expenses, with \$1.7 million in cash acquired through the acquisition, to reflect the acquired deferred revenue.

MDR also reported that it has continued its rollout in New Zealand, with 204 pharmacies across the Green Cross network now using its services, representing 25% of the NZ market.

The company noted that there has also been significant change at MDR in recent months, with new US-based CEO, Rick Ratliff, starting in his role on 17 Jul, while Pharmacy Guild of Australia Victorian Branch President, Anthony Tassone, was appointed

to the Board on 27 Jul, as a non-executive director, while Josh Swinnerton retired from the Board, but remained with MDR as an executive.

New Chief Financial Officer, Ancila Desai, joined MDR earlier this month, with Kevin Hutchinson set to join the Board as a non-executive director in Nov.

Meanwhile, funds management firm, Perennial Value Management Limited, has increased its stake in MDR from 10.52% to 11.56% this week.

However the Guild remains MDR's largest shareholder with an 18% holding.

FIP COVID report

THE International Pharmaceutical Federation has published a new report highlighting how the global pharmacy profession responded to the COVID-19 pandemic across the world.

The release came 1,000 days after the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

The report describes how FIP supported international solidarity, advocated the value of pharmacy in pandemic response, gathered evidence of impact and adapted its ways of working.

A sample of FIP member organisations on their pandemic activities is also included, with information coming from 42 countries and territories - such as developing and updating clinical guidance, public education programs, providing health professional education, facilitating supplies of medicines and PPE, diagnostic testing and vaccinations in pharmacies & more - **CLICK HERE** to view.

Motorist cops fine for pharmacy crash

NORTHERN Irishman, John McDonagh, has earned himself six demerit points and a fine after crashing into a pharmacy in the early hours of 03 Mar.

Magherafelt Magistrates Court heard that the 40-year-old motorist's VW Transporter van collided with the corner of the store, before leaving the scene at 1.50am.

Using the vehicle's registration,

local police were able to identify McDonagh as the owner of the van, which he had abandoned.

The Court was told McDonagh had "taken a mini-roundabout at too much speed" and lost control, resulting in the collision.

McDonagh's solicitor explained that he had not reported the accident, as he believed that he only needed to report an incident, if someone had been injured.

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Pathology lab hacked

MEDLAB Pathology has issued an ASX announcement confirming that in Feb this year it experienced a cyber incident “where some personal information of its patients and staff was involved”.

The company said it was not aware of any information being misused, but confirmed that some of the details had been published on the “dark web”.

After taking several months to analyse the information which had been stolen, Medlab said it had now started the process of notifying impacted individuals of the types of information that had been involved and additional steps they can take.

Medlab customers have been told to monitor email and post for a notification in the coming weeks, with a support centre available on 1800 433 980.

Priceline gets festive with Chrissie

WESFARMERS-OWNED pharmacy franchise, Priceline Pharmacy, is getting into the Christmas spirit with the launch of an eight-week campaign featuring brand ambassador, Chrissie Swan.

The ‘That’s the Chrissie Spirit’ promotion will invite customers to “fill their stockings” at Priceline stores with gifts and exclusive brands, the banner’s General Manager, Andrew Vidler, said.

“Christmas is when Priceline Pharmacy pulls out all stops to make shopping fun, fulfilling and a little bit playful,” he said.

“There are few pharmacy brands Australians turn to for their Christmas shopping, but at Priceline, it’s hard not to catch the festive bug.

“Our stores are full with Christmas point of sale, our teams delight in sharing expert advice – including on the best gifts – and all of this is amplified through an extensive national media campaign.

“While there is lots of commentary



on how consumers are carefully considering their spending in the current economy, we’re forecasting strong seasonal sales for our stores across our affordable gifting range.

“Customers visit Priceline not only for their families’ health and beauty needs, but for the special moments year-round.

“Families are finally reuniting, sales of our travel range have increased by 45%, as people vacation once again, so this Christmas feels like the

one we’ve all been longing for.

“That’s the Chrissie Spirit launched on 25 Oct with a national TV commercial starring Chrissie Swan.

“The campaign will be amplified with interactive gift guides in major publications including *The Australian Women’s Weekly*, *Marie Claire*, *Body + Soul* and more.”

In addition to being the face of the group’s latest campaign, Swan is set to continue as a Priceline ambassador for another two years.

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Dispensary Corner

TRUTH in advertising matters, particularly when it comes to pharmaceuticals - so it's no wonder two US consumers are suing a California cannabis firm for allegedly lying about the strength of its products.

The pair are the lead plaintiffs in a newly filed class action lawsuit accusing DreamFields Brands Inc and Med for America Inc of false advertising and negligent misrepresentation.

The key issue centres on "Jeeter Prerolls" - basically marijuana cigarettes - which are claimed to have inflated levels of THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) quoted on their labels.

Facts cited note that "Californians want high-THC cannabis products, and are willing to pay more for them".

The plaintiffs say they've had their Jeeters tested by independent laboratories - as well as a comprehensive review in a specialist publication called *Weed Week* - which showed the product's THC content is "materially less than the amount listed on the label".

The case isn't just about recreational use, with the filing noting that about two million Californians - or 5% of the state's population - "use cannabis medically to treat conditions such as cancer, glaucoma, AIDS and seizures".

The court documents cite Jeeter advertising making claims such as "averaging over 35% THC and available in multiple strains and sizes, this is the one joint that will get you to Mars quicker than Elon Musk".

Walgreens adopts new KPI model

PHARMACISTS working for US retail giant, Walgreens, will be encouraged to operate at the top of their scope of practice under its new performance review model.

In a statement released this week the company's Global Chief Human Resources Officer, Holly May, said it was eliminating "all task-based metrics" for assessing pharmacists, including targets for processing prescriptions.

"We're proud to take a strong position in the industry with this measure, one we are taking due to feedback from our pharmacy team members and also as part of our commitment to pharmacy quality and patient care," she said.

"We've continued to make investments to elevate the role of our pharmacists and to foster an environment that enables them to best care for our patients and customers.

"Coupled with other infrastructure enhancements and technology investments, this allows our pharmacy team members to do the work they love and engage with our patients and communities in the way they were trained."

The company said that the



change in its approach to talent management comes as it lays the groundwork for new areas of pharmacist care, such as testing and treating routine illnesses.

"Moving forward, pharmacy teams will be evaluated based solely on the behaviours that best support patient care and enhance the patient experience, in line with the company's core values," Walgreens said.

"This is the latest action Walgreens is taking to care for its team members, building on numerous investments the company has made to address

pharmacy staffing as well as to retain and reward pharmacy staff.

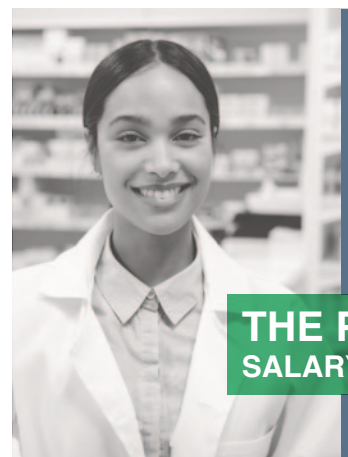
"As the most accessible healthcare providers in thousands of communities, Walgreens pharmacists are uniquely positioned to help improve patient outcomes and fill critical gaps within the US healthcare system."

The business noted that since Aug 2021 it has made incremental investments of US\$190 million to boost the wages of its pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, with further investments of US\$265 million for pharmacy staff planned for fiscal year 2023.

BKL appointment

AUSTRALIAN Securities Exchange-listed health supplement brand, Blackmores (BKL), has announced the appointment of Lyn Nikolopoulos as Joint Company Secretary effective immediately.

BKL's current General Counsel and Company Secretary, Helen Mediati, will continue in the role alongside Nikolopoulos.



It is our 5th year of producing the report, which endeavours to provide an essential guide for those wishing to understand the movement of salaries within the pharmacy industry, as well as the key trends impacting business over the past year.

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