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## Today's issue of PD

*Pharmacy Daily* today features four pages of news, plus a full page from **Glucobears** and a Fact Sheet from **Flordis**.

## Cut cost of meds

A **NEW** journal by the Australian Healthcare and Hospital Association (AHHA), has boosted the case for the Pharmacy Guild's 'Affordable Medicines Now' relaunched campaign.

The AHHA's *Australian Health Review* says the high cost of medicines acts as a barrier for Australians wanting to maintain their health.

## Probiotics' check

**FLORDIS** has a fact sheet on probiotics with a checklist on what to look for when recommending them to your patients.

Flordis has a range of clinically researched products to suit the needs of a variety of patients.

See more on the **back page**.

## Sigma to pursue growth

**SIGMA** Healthcare says that having significantly improved its operational performance over the last 12 months "we are now confident in our ability to win back the trust and confidence of customers".

The company yesterday released its Annual Report for the 12 months to 31 Jan, with CEO Vikesh Ramsunder noting the year had seen Sigma simplify its business model, stabilise new systems, renew the leadership team, reduce debt, return to profit and outline a new strategy including the consolidation of its brands around the Amcal and Discount Drug Stores banners.

"While this strategy may be disruptive short term, building scale in two brands will enable Sigma to better support the brands and drive foot traffic by engaging with customers, suppliers and pharmacists," Ramsunder said.

"Moving forward, it will also help underpin our expansion into health, beauty and wellness categories, including an expanded private and exclusive label product offering, which is an important part of our longer term strategy," he added.

Ramsunder also highlighted

the consolidation of Sigma's independent pharmacy offering under the PriceSave initiative which launched in Feb 2023 and now has more than 400 active members.

The shareholder update highlighted a 2.2% increase in wholesale sales to community pharmacy over the year despite the ERP implementation issues encountered early in the first half.

With those matters now in the past, "Jan 2023 data has shown positive signs, with Sigma growing sales at a rate well above average market growth rates," he said.

The revised franchise brand strategy has seen Sigma's merchandise team consolidated in the Melbourne Support Centre using a category-focused model in which each team is responsible for full end-to-end product decisions.

"The new operating model delivers a more efficient structure, an improved retail focus and incorporates Private Label in all aspects of planning and execution," the company said.

The update also highlighted the performance of the MPS Connect medication management platform which recorded a 17.5% uplift in packed patients over the year.

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## Merck to buy Prometheus for A\$16b

**MERCK** & Co has said it will buy Prometheus Biosciences Inc for about US\$10.8b (A\$16b), picking up a promising experimental treatment for ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease and building up its presence in immunology, *Reuters* has reported.

Merck will pay US\$200 (A\$298.5) per share for the California-based biotechnology company that specialises in treatments for autoimmune diseases.

That represents a 75% premium to the US\$114.01 (A\$169.8) closing price for Prometheus shares last week.

"This is allowing us to move into immunology in a strong way and will allow us sustainable growth, we think, well into the 2030s given the long patent life," Merck Chief Executive Robert Davis said in an interview with *Reuters*.

Davis said the Prometheus drug, PRA023, being developed to treat ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, and other autoimmune conditions,

could be a multi-billion-dollar seller for Merck.

He said the recent release of encouraging Phase II clinical trial results drove Merck to pounce.

"We've been watching their clinical development program for a while," Davis said.



If the deal closes in the third quarter of this year as hoped, Merck could launch a late-stage ulcerative colitis study of the drug in the fourth quarter or first quarter of 2024, Davis said.

Merck has been looking for deals to protect itself from eventual revenue loss as patents on its blockbuster cancer immunotherapy Keytruda begin to expire toward the end of the decade.

The company reported nearly

US\$21b (A\$34.3b) in Keytruda sales last year.

Davis said revenue from the Prometheus acquisition could start to roll in around the time Keytruda patents could potentially expire.

Davis compared the deal to one he struck in 2021 for Acceleron, which allowed Merck to quickly build out its pipeline of cardiovascular drugs.

"I believe now we have a very strong portfolio in the cardiometabolic space.

"We see this acquisition of Prometheus building out a similar portfolio in the immunology space," said Davis, adding that Merck would continue to be opportunistic on acquisitions, but will be agnostic about size.

"We look where we see the most compelling science, and where that science aligns with value we move," Davis said, noting that the company is not interested in large transformative or cost-synergy driven deals.

## UK chain merger

**WELL** Pharmacy has bought two wholesalers, Asurex Limited and Lexon UK Holdings - a wholesaler that also operates over 40 community pharmacies in the UK, reported *C+D* from a company statement.

The deal also includes the manufacturer Key Pharmaceuticals which is part of the Lexon UK group.

Well Pharmacy CEO Seb Hobbes was "delighted" to welcome Lexon and Asurex's 1,200 team members to the company.

"These are incredibly challenging times for community pharmacy, so we're really pleased to be able to have an opportunity to show our commitment to the sector, now and into the future," he said.

Well was unable to comment on whether these pharmacies will rebrand to become Well pharmacies as part of the deal.

## DRAW THE LINE...

## When it comes to Pain relief



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## Veterans for CBD

**THE** Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) recently updated its Medicinal Cannabis Framework, allowing GPs to seek approval of funding without the need for a non-GP specialist's assessment.

"The Cann I Help initiative, which is supported by Medcan Australia, is a safe space for our veterans who need access to medicinal cannabis, but perhaps couldn't afford it before now," said Head of Medical at Cann I Help, Dr Laurence Kemp.

The treatment is funded through the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

When news of the updated government framework was confirmed, Kemp and his network of GPs developed a dedicated Veterans Access Program.

"Through the Cann I Help network, they can speak to one of our nurses at no cost and they can have an initial assessment with one of our doctors at a discounted rate," Kemp explained.

"If they don't meet the Tier 1 criteria, and require a Tier 2 application, this can be done."

According to Kemp, a member of the Australia and New Zealand College of Cannabis Practitioners, if a veteran meets the criteria, Cann I Help can issue them a DVA-funded prescription.

## Stockpiling has started

**PAINAUSTRALIA** warns that people have started stockpiling paracetamol, meaning that many could have stores of hundreds, if not thousands of tablets by the time the proposed changes in pack sizes are implemented next year.

"I think our cohort started immediately when the proposed change was announced (*PD* 06 Feb), especially for the slow release paracetamol Panadol Osteo," the organisation's head Giulia Jones said.

"Even though their medicine isn't at the moment on a script, they are using it very regularly - some people for flare ups and other people just to cope from day to day.

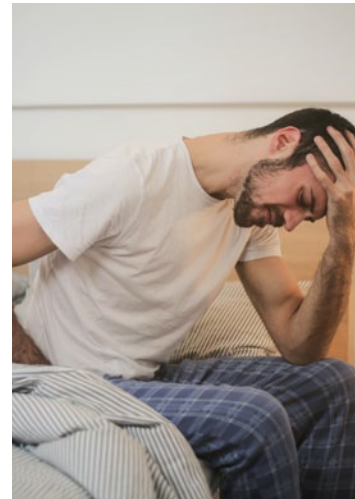
"And as a result, they really do need to be able to have access to six to eight paracetamol a day.

"As a result of that, as soon as concern, whispers and suggestions go round about things being harder, they are more likely to go and buy more," Jones said.

The reduction of pack sizes is part of a raft of proposed amendments to the Poisons Standard, designed to reduce Australia's incidence of serious injury and death from intentional paracetamol overdose.

In a submission to the TGA about the changes, Jones wrote "cutting the maximum size of packs available for general sale via supermarkets and convenience stores from 20 to 16 tablets or capsules would provide only three days' pain relief.

"Not everyone lives close to shops and those on low incomes often



can only afford to buy paracetamol on payday.

"For those who have low incomes, have limited transport options, and/or live in rural and remote areas, this creates an impediment to self-management of their chronic pain."

A survey by Painaustralia found the decision to reduce pack sizes of paracetamol is not supported by consumers.

Only 25% of respondents agreed with the proposal to reduce pack sizes.

But the peak doctors' organisation, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, has called to further cut the pack size of paracetamol tabs available off the shelf in pharmacies and to up-schedule modified-release paracetamol to prescription-only.

## AFT next US step

**AFT** Pharmaceuticals has announced it has submitted to the US Food and Drug Administration data the regulator requested as it considers registration of the company's patented intravenous pain relief medicine Maxigesic IV.

In a delay to the registration of the medicine in the US, the FDA requested in Jul 2022 additional data on the performance of Maxigesic IV's primary packaging (the glass vial in which the medicine is stored and the vial's stopper).

AFT along with its commercialisation partner Belgium's Hyloris Pharmaceuticals has over the last year collated the data and submitted today.

AFT Managing Director Dr Hartley Atkinson said, "we believe the data we have submitted will satisfy the FDA's requirements and remove the outstanding hurdle to registration.

"All going well we anticipate registration of the medicine this year and sales to follow shortly after."

Maxigesic IV is a combination of 1,000mg paracetamol and 300mg ibuprofen solution for infusion, for the treatment of post-operative pain, and is currently licensed in more than 100 countries across the globe.

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## Dispensary Corner

**WHEN** King Charles stays on his Balmoral estate, his police protection officers have a running joke about whose turn it is to accompany His Majesty on his "leisurely stroll" each day, *The Telegraph* has reported.

The daily constitutional, of course, is neither leisurely nor a stroll, but rather an hour-long dash across hills and moors that is more route march than ramble.

"It takes effort for a fit man half his age to keep up with him," one former aide says.

"Many a VIP has fallen by the wayside over the years when they have gone off on a walk with him."

At the age of 74, the King has ensured that he remains fit for the purpose for which he was destined.

Good genes and world-class healthcare can only take you so far, and Charles III knows it, as surely the most health-conscious sovereign UK has had, *The Telegraph* commented.

Staying on your feet for hours at a time, particularly in foreign countries where the heat may be stifling, requires stamina, and the King ensures he has it by setting himself targets every day, which he has the discipline and willpower to achieve.

He aims to maintain a weight of 11st 5lbs (72kg), which at 5ft 10in (1.778m) tall gives him an ideal body mass index of 22.8.

To do that requires a combination of good diet and exercise, though he jokes keeping his weight down is a "never-ending battle".

## True cost of a cold is \$11k

**SHORTENING** the duration of a cold could save Aussies up to \$11k a year, according to Australian finance expert Canna Campbell.

With the cold and flu season expected to start early this year<sup>[1]</sup>, and everyday bills for Aussies continuing to rise<sup>[2]</sup>, "it's not all doom and gloom for families who could save up to \$11,000 per year by shortening the duration of their colds this winter," Campbell who is also founder of *SugarMammaTV* said.

Furthermore, the biggest financial impact of being unwell is to the Australian economy.

According to a recent report conducted by Frost & Sullivan, absenteeism and productivity costs the economy around \$14.1b each year, rising to \$24.2b by the end of last year.

To further understand the financial impact of getting sick, Campbell has calculated the true cost of a cold.

"Looking at what the average Australian earns, which is just over \$94,000 a year and with 260 working days per year, each day from work could cost you \$361.53 before tax.

"If you are a growing family, with unpaid sick leave and day-care costs, those two to five colds per year can cost you up to \$737.53 each day.

"If you need three days to recover, this escalates to \$2,212.59 per cold, which could cost up to \$11,000 per year!" Campbell said.

For Australians that don't work in a traditional corporate setting with benefits such as sick leave, the ramifications of a cold can be even more significant.

Jobs such as trades, contractors, freelancers, and business owners don't have the same protections or



flexibility that other employees may have, the Fair Work Ombudsman has reported.

As a result, they are more likely to suffer from lost wages.

PharmaCare Laboratories who distribute brands Sambucol and EASEaCOLD said it understands the physical impact that having a cold can have and that its products shorten and relieve common cold and flu symptoms.

"These products reduce the severity of cold and flu symptoms and is clinically proven to shorten the duration of a cold by up to three days, this reduction in time off work offers a potential saving of approximately \$2,212.59," Campbell said.

"With cost of living rising in Australia it's more important than ever for Aussies to save their pennies and reduce household costs.

"One unpaid day of sick leave might not seem too problematic, however costs can quickly add up and further impact already stressed families," Campbell concluded.

## Guild Update

### Guild steps up campaign on affordable medicines

**WITH** the Federal budget now less than a month away, the Pharmacy Guild has stepped up its rebooted 'Affordable Medicines Campaign' pushing for a lower maximum PBS co-payment of \$19.

The campaign has now broadened to the airwaves with radio ads demanding Canberra lower the price Australians pay for their prescription medicines.

Also in the past week, Guild National President Trent Twomey has sent members a video message asking them for help.

"What I need you to do is that when you are vaccinating your local politician against influenza this season, raise this issue with them.

"What I need you to do is raise the 'Affordable Medicines Now' campaign with your patients," Twomey says in the video.

After weeks of back-to-back meetings with politicians and health officials in Canberra, Professor Twomey says the Guild is doing everything it can on behalf of pharmacies throughout Australia.

He also says it's important the budget does what it's supposed to do for the "26 million Australians who rely on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme". To watch the video, click [HERE](#).

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## Choose your probiotic like a trillion tiny lives depend on it.

### Checklist: What to look for when recommending probiotics to your patients

#### STEP 1: Strain

- Does the product only contain strain-specific probiotics?**  
 Did you know? Certain probiotic strains are more effective for certain conditions than others, even within the same Genus. The strain refers to a specific genetic variant with particular characteristics that may not appear in other members of the same species.
- Are the probiotics supported by robust clinical research?**  
 What to look for in a robust clinical study:
  - ✓ Do the results support the primary objective of the trial?
  - ✓ Was the study performed on the specific probiotic strains, rather than the Genus or Species?
  - ✓ Was it double-blind, placebo controlled and studied on humans?
  - ✓ Was there a significant population size and positive outcome?

#### STEP 2: Formulation

- Does the formula contain any 'filler' strains lacking evidence relevant to product claims?**
- Are any active ingredients included in the clinical research but missing in the final product?**

#### STEP 3: Dose & Delivery

- Are the strains provided in the same CFU count as studied in the research?**
- Does the product mode of delivery match what was used in the research?**  
 For example, probiotics researched as a vaginal suppository may not deliver the same therapeutic benefit when taken as an oral supplement.

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