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## Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of pharmacy news.

## WA's response

THE Pharmacy Guild of Australia WA Branch has expressed concerns about the proposal to reverse-list Chemist Warehouse on the Australian Securities Exchange via Sigma Healthcare Ltd.

The proposed merger poses significant questions and risks related to aspects of patient care, community pharmacy ownership, competition, and the future of the Customer Service Obligation.

Guild WA branch President Andrew Ngeow said, "each detail of this proposal needs to be scrutinised to ensure that Western Australians health and safety is always maintained, as medicines are not ordinary items of commerce".

# PSA's workforce survey seeks input

THE Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) has launched a pharmacist workforce survey this week, with support from The University of Queensland.

The *Pharmacy in Australia: measuring employment, labour decisions and activity* (PAMELA) survey aims to capture current and future dynamics of the Australian pharmacy workforce, including trends in job history, income, career plan, professional commitment, and job satisfaction to help foster a better understanding of workforce decisions by pharmacists.

In launching the survey, PSA National President Dr Fei Sim encourages all pharmacists, at all career stages and across practice areas, to complete the pharmacist workforce survey.

"Decisions around work patterns are complex, and take into account pay and conditions, but also family and personal circumstances, location and professional roles," Sim commented.



The results of the PAMELA project will help the sector better understand what is motivating pharmacists to make their work decisions, and how policy change can enhance job satisfaction and promote work-life balance across the profession, Sim explained.

"The PSA consistently advocates for a national approach to health workforce planning, including measuring trends and the impact of the pharmacist workforce on health outcomes, to support workforce capacity into the future.

"Ensuring that we can continue to

meet the future healthcare needs of our ageing population requires understanding our workforce now so that we appropriately plan for the future," Sim said.

Prof Lisa Nissen (pictured), part of the University of Queensland's research team supporting the PAMELA project, added that pharmacy schools are also supporting the survey by alerting alumni to the survey.

"Anyone with a pharmacy degree, even if they are not registered or practising, is invited to participate so that we can better understand why some people choose to leave the profession," Prof Nissen said.

"It is just as essential to know why people leave the profession for other opportunities or careers, as why they stay," she remarked.

Pharmacy schools are training the pharmacists of the future, "we need to better understand workforce trends in order to adapt our curriculum to be relevant to the changing practice of pharmacy". JG

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## Super ageing

**RESEARCH** led by UNSW Sydney's Centre for Healthy Brain Ageing has highlighted the need for clarity when defining late-life cognitively high performers, which could ultimately inform strategies to help prevent the development of dementia.

Currently, there isn't a consistent approach to measuring cognitive super-ageing, stated UNSW.

Super-ageing refers to the elite group of individuals who maintained varying degrees of midlife levels of capability and activity into very late life.

A 'cognitive super-ager' is deemed to demonstrate higher levels of intellectual activity than their more cognitively average peers.

Super-agers have been shown to have healthier lifestyles, less diabetes, and, from a genetic standpoint, have lower rates of the protein associated with Alzheimer's disease.

Imaging of the brains of super-agers also shows less brain atrophy, greater white matter integrity and differences in functional connectivity.

However, how super-ageing is best defined and how exactly it differs from usual or normal ageing remain unanswered.

Most studies consider super-ageing based on memory performance that is equivalent or comparable to that of a younger adult range, but very few examine other aspects of cognition or the maintenance of high-level abilities over time.

The review, published in the *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, comprises a systematic literature search of 44 studies across five major research databases from their inception until Jul 2023.

It aimed to evaluate the literature identifying older adults with exceptional cognitive performance with an emphasis on how super-ageing is defined, and the key clinical features that sets them apart.

## Make a wish at Blooms

**BLOOMS** The Chemist is supporting Make-A-Wish Australia this Christmas through the sale of bauble tokens, with all proceeds donated to make wishes like five-year-old Jackson's come true.

The tokens feature different designs and can be personalised with the name of the donor.

Jackson (**pictured**) was diagnosed with Wilms' tumour two years ago, and loves Christmas so much that he watches Christmas movies on repeat, wearing Christmas socks all year round.

His ultimate wish is to live out his favourite festive movies, and take a winter wonderland snow trip.

"He loves everything about it - the tinsel, the lights, the gingerbread, the tree, and the little presents," said Jackson's mother, Brooke.

"It was really hard for Jackson, being isolated from his family as he undergoes treatment.

"A wish gives kids something else to think about and gives them another place to go."

Since 2016, Blooms The Chemist has donated over \$1.87 million to Make-A-Wish Australia, and hopes to add even more to the total with this year's Christmas campaign.

"Make-A-Wish Australia is incredibly proud of our long-standing partnership with Blooms



The Chemist and the impact this continues to have in the community," said Sally Bateman, Make-A-Wish Australia CEO.

"With over 900 critically ill kids currently part of our wish program, there has never been a better time to support this campaign and give the gift of hope this Christmas."

Blooms The Chemist CEO Emmanuel Vavoulas added, "the work that Make-A-Wish Australia does for critically ill children and their families is inspiring".

"Granting wishes is an incredible act of kindness, and one that we are so proud to support.

"We encourage customers who can head to their local Blooms The Chemist store and purchase a bauble token to help make wishes like Jackson's come true." JG

## NT pharmacists to administer more vax

**THE** Northern Territory Govt has moved to cut unnecessary red tape and allow qualified pharmacist-immunisers to administer a wider range of vaccines from early next year.

The PSA welcomed the move that from 01 Jan, pharmacist-immunisers will be authorised to administer all vaccines listed on the National Immunisation Program (NIP) Schedule, including as private vaccines to those who are not eligible for NIP funding, for consumers aged five years and older.

The update also authorises pharmacists to administer vaccines outside of community pharmacy settings, opening the door for pharmacist-led

vaccination outreach clinics across the Territory.

PSA NT and SA President Dr Manya Angley said these changes send the right message.

"Maintaining immunisation is a lifelong commitment and pharmacists are accessible and trusted health practitioners in communities throughout the NT.

"There should be no wrong door when a patient is seeking a vaccine, whether from their local GP or pharmacist.

"Allowing pharmacists to administer vaccines in a range of settings also unlocks the full potential of our immunisation workforce, allowing outreach clinics to offer targeted health promotions," Angley commented.

## Genetic study

**RESEARCHERS** from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) have found a biological mechanism behind the reduction of migraine frequency in chronic migraine sufferers, after their gradual withdrawal from available migraine medications.

The study, *Alterations in DNA methylation associate with reduced migraine and headache days after medication withdrawal treatment in chronic migraine patients: a longitudinal study*, was published in *Clinical Epigenetics* and described the finding of epigenetic changes in two genes implicated in the transition from episodic migraines to chronic migraine.

First author QUT geneticist Prof Divya Mehta from QUT's Centre for Genomics and Personalised Health in the School of Biomedical Sciences said chronic migraine was a major headache for about 2% of the population.

"Overuse of acute headache pain relief and other medications is an important factor in the development and maintenance of chronic migraine," Prof Mehta said.

Co-first author and researcher molecular biologist and geneticist Dr Heidi Sutherland added that DNA was analysed from blood taken from patients with chronic migraine at the beginning of and after the 12-week withdrawal from medication treatment.

"We found epigenetic changes in the HDAC4 gene that were associated with a mean reduction in headache days following the withdrawal of acute medication and that decreased DNA methylation levels were associated with reduced headache days."

Prof Mehta said the findings had "huge clinical implications as they indicated that these genes might be novel therapeutic targets for migraine treatment".





## Dispensary Corner

**NEW** York pharmacists have a reason to be extremely nervous as it was recently reported that pharmacy burglaries have increased an incredible 620% over the past two years.

Opioids and stimulants as well as common medications have been named as the target for the criminals who are going to all lengths in order to get what they need.

"They know exactly what they're looking for, and that's the opioids and the stimulants," Frank Tarentino, Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration in New York, told *PIX 11*, a local media network.

Tarentino continued by saying that they were also targeting cough medicine with codeine and promethazine - the combination often mixed together to produce a cocktail called "Purple Drank", which has become popular in recent rap songs.

Meanwhile, police are also trying to track down a group of burglars that have broken into almost two dozen stores in New York city.

Captured on video all dressed in black, the group smash the glass doors of closed pharmacies while having a car described as a "white or grey BMW" on standby as the getaway vehicle.

They've broken into 20 pharmacies in Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island since 27 Jul.

It's certainly not a good time to be a pharmacist in New York at the moment.

## COVID-safe actions ebb

**RESULTS** from new research conducted during Australia's eighth COVID-19 wave showed that one-third of Australians do not believe that COVID-safe measures, such as staying up to date with vaccinations, wearing masks, hand sanitisation and social distancing, are important to protect against the prevalent virus.

*The COVID Community Sentiment Index*, a quantitative research survey regularly commissioned by Pfizer Australia, canvassed Australians' views on COVID-19 last month, and showed that one-third do not believe that staying up to date with vaccinations is important nor is wearing masks, hand sanitisation and social distancing in protecting against the disease.

Additionally, just under two-thirds of Australians do not think that new COVID-19 variants will have a significant impact on them in one year.

Prof Robert Booy, an infectious diseases specialist from University of Sydney, is urging Australians to resist complacency ahead of the holiday season.

"As much as we would all like to forget about COVID-19, COVID-19 is not done with us," Booy remarked.

Evidence shows that the disease continues to evolve and have a significant impact on our communities, especially those at higher risk of severe illness, he said.

"With COVID-19 part of our new reality, we need to continue to embed some habits and measures to protect ourselves and our communities," he commented.

The research also found that more than half of older Australians, who are often at higher risk of severe disease, believe new variants of COVID-19 will not have a significant impact on them a year from now.



Moreover, one-third of older Australians think that vaccinations will not be important for protection against COVID-19 a year from now.

Federal Govt data shows that as of 01 Dec, an average of 165 Australians a day were admitted to hospital with COVID-19 and 57 people were in intensive care units with complications from the virus.

A recent report also found that 2.5 million people aged 65 years or older were not up to date with their six-monthly COVID-19 vaccine dose, two million more than in 2022.

In addition, three-quarters of Australians aged 75 years or older had not received a COVID-19 vaccination in the six months leading up to Nov.

"With many people travelling and gathering to celebrate the holiday season, it's important to remember that COVID loves a crowd.

"Even though most healthy Australians are protected against severe COVID, there remain a few million vulnerable people who have not had an updated COVID-19 vaccination in the last six months.

"Taking precautions this Christmas season is only sensible," Booy explained. *JG*

## Guild Update

### Workforce Survey results are in!

**THE** Pharmacy Guild's biannual workforce survey results have been revealed after undertaking the research in Aug.

Pharmacists, pharmacy owners, pharmacy assistants and pharmacy students were surveyed, stated the Guild.

Among the key findings were:

- Community pharmacy employees worked on average of 29.1 hours per week, however pharmacy owners and managers indicated that they worked an average of 35.8 hours per week.
- 38% of community pharmacy employees were employed on a full time basis, while 29% were employed part time and 33% were casual.
- 75% of community pharmacy employees indicated that they have worked within the pharmacy industry for more than five years.
- Some of the significant concerns regarding the future of community pharmacy were inadequate remuneration, inflation, and staff burnout.
- The elements of community pharmacy that participants value most within their roles were related to patient care and making a difference in provision of health services to the community.

The survey is part of the Pharmacy Guild's Workforce Capability Project to develop a better understanding of the workforce's capability, capacity and employability needs within and for community pharmacy.

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