

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features two pages of news, plus the January MIMS update.

PPA launches wages calculator

UNION group Professional Pharmacists Australia (PPA) is now offering an online "Hospital Pharmacy Pay Calculator" which promises to highlight pay gaps between different hospital pharmacists.

"Do you often hear rumours about what pharmacists and technicians get paid at other hospitals," the PPA website asks, offering to "sort fact from fiction" with the calculator.

The platform allows hospital pharmacists and technicians to enter their current details and pay rates, and then provides a full and frank assessment including comparative pay rates from other public and private hospital pharmacy operations across Australia.

The move aims to galvanise new membership for the organisation.

Public to upskill in funded course

WITH the role of pharmacies expanding The Pharmacy Guild of Australia, Queensland Branch President Chris Owen has urged residents of Brisbane and Ipswich to take up the opportunity to gain skills in pharmacy via the Queensland Government's fully-funded training course.

"Pharmacies will always play a key role in keeping the community healthy. In recent years, this role has grown bigger and community pharmacies have become integral primary health care providers," said Mr Owen.

"Those in and around Brisbane and Ipswich who are eligible have a great opportunity in 2023 to become qualified pharmacy assistants via the Queensland Government's Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative and work in Queensland's extensive network of more than 1,200 community pharmacies."

Mr Owen said the fully-funded program offered an excellent opportunity for community members to join the respected pharmacy profession.

"Once working as a pharmacy assistant, there are opportunities to specialise in particular areas that

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interest you and further your career by completing additional training through the Guild," Mr Owen said.

The Fundamentals of Community Pharmacy course is fully subsidised for eligible participants through the Queensland Government's Skilling Queenslanders for Work program.

After the successful delivery of 11 courses in 2022, The Pharmacy Guild of Australia, Queensland Branch, will continue to deliver courses in 2023.

The in-person course runs for seven weeks and incorporates ten days of vocational placement in a community pharmacy where participants can put their learning into action and gain practical experience.

Successful graduates of the course will receive a nationally accredited SIR20116 Certificate II in Community Pharmacy and gain the skills and knowledge required to meet the needs of community pharmacy patients.

With limited places available, interested participants in the Brisbane and Ipswich regions are encouraged to complete their expression of interest now, with each course commencing on Monday 16 January.

For more information about the Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative, eligibility criteria and submitting your expression of interest, head to the Guild site at www.guild.org.au/cws.

Australian first - a multicultural hotline

PEOPLE from diverse communities in NSW needing mental health support are set to benefit from an Australian-first multicultural mental health phone line service covering up to 30 different languages.

Recently launched by the NSW Liberals and Nationals in Government, the service is staffed by registered bilingual mental health professionals covering languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Korean, Vietnamese and Ukrainian.

Minister for Mental Health Bronnie Taylor said this new phone line would support people from diverse communities who are struggling with their mental health to access services.

"While there is a wide range

of mental health services available to all NSW residents, language and different cultural understandings of mental health can act as a barrier for people when accessing services.

"This new phone line will support people to get the help they need, with a specialist team of health care professionals ready to provide care and connect people with the appropriate services," she said.

Available Mon to Fri between 9:00am and 4:30pm on 1800 648 911, the Transcultural Mental Health Line improves access to mental healthcare.

The \$3.2 million investment over four years is part of the \$130 million COVID-19 Mental Health Recovery package.

NSW Guild issues urgent scam alert

PHARMACIES in Sydney have been urged to protect their businesses by disabling the MOTO (Mail Order/Telephone Order) functionality on their point of sale platforms, after

thieves targeting the sector stole over \$10,000 worth of goods.

IDs should be retained for any MOTO transactions over \$500, with the Guild urgently escalating the issue with NSW Police.

The Emergency Locum Service (ELS) provides support to community pharmacies in rural and remote regions of Australia

via direct access to pharmacist locums in emergency situations.

Call us: 1800 991 541 (24/7)

Register as an Emergency Locum Pharmacist

Emergency Locum Service

Raven's recruitment

7CPA

Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care

Pharmacy Programs Administrator

Dispensary Corner

WANT free meat for a year? Get a COVID-19 shot in the US. Meatpacker JBS SA said this week that it will give away beef, pork and chicken for the next year to 50 US families that participate in company-sponsored vaccination clinics over the coming weeks.

The Brazilian company's arm in the United States and Pilgrim's Pride, a US chicken company mostly owned by JBS, came under fire last year as thousands of meat-packing workers fell sick with COVID-19. US processing plants temporarily shut last year to contain COVID-19 outbreaks, tightening meat supplies and raising prices.

The companies said nearly 70% of their 66,000 US employees are now fully vaccinated and that they hope the meat giveaways encourage residents in rural areas, not just employees, around their facilities to get shots.

This is the latest incentive to win over the vaccine-hesitant.

New option for gut pain

TARGETING a receptor responsible for our sense of touch and temperature, which researchers have now found to be present in our colon, could provide a new avenue for treating chronic pain associated with gastrointestinal disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome.

A team examining the colon, led by Professor Hongzhen Hu at Washington University in St Louis and Professor Nick Spencer at Flinders University, identified the presence of Piezo2, the subject of the 2021 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, now known to be responsible for sensing light touch on our skin.

"In discovering that this receptor is also in our gut, there's the potential that selectively targeting these channels could be used for long-term silencing of pain sensations from internal organs, without the need for frequent consumption of opiate pain medications," said Professor Spencer, a Matthew Flinders Professor in the College of Medicine and Public Health.

"Chronic pain from internal organs, such as the gut or bladder, is notoriously difficult to treat.

"Opiates, including morphine and their derivatives have been commonly used to treat a variety of types of pain but visceral pain doesn't respond well to the treatment and the drugs are highly addictive with a multitude of side effects."

The authors said the availability of selective pain medications for the gut has been hindered by a lack of understanding about how sensory nerves communicate pain sensations from the gut to the brain.

"It was previously known that many different ion channels are located on the 'pain-sensing' neurons that communicate from the gut to the brain, but our study, published in the journal *Neuron*, has now identified the major ion channel in the colon that responds to mechanical stimulation leading to the sensation of pain," said Professor Spencer.

"Furthermore, we have discovered that the major ion channel that responds to this mechanical pain is a member of the Piezo ion channel, specifically Piezo2.

"We can target these channels to silence pain sensations," he said.

Alzheimer's drug



TESTED in persons with early Alzheimer's disease is lecanemab, a humanised IgG1 monoclonal antibody that binds with high affinity to Aβ soluble protofibrils.

In a trial 1,795 participants were enrolled, with 898 assigned to receive lecanemab and 897 to receive placebo.

The mean CDR-SB score at baseline was approximately 3.2 in both groups.

Lecanemab reduced markers of amyloid in early Alzheimer's disease and resulted in moderately less decline on measures of cognition and function than placebo at 18 months but was associated with adverse events.

Longer trials are needed to determine its efficacy and safety, *NEJM* reported.

Shortage of cold and cough medicines

PHARMACIES say a lack of government planning is behind a shortage of cough and cold medicines in shops in the UK, *BBC News* reported.

The Association of Independent Multiple Pharmacies said its members reported a scarcity of "all medicines", in particular cough mixtures and lozenges.

Flu and COVID cases have put pressure on the NHS

and pharmacies said there should have been "better" communication with manufacturers.

Ministers said availability issues were "temporary and localised".

"We are engaging with suppliers to investigate and help ensure that over-the-counter cold and flu medicines remain available," a UK Department of Health spokesperson added.

US pharmacies can sell abortion pills

RETAIL pharmacies in the US can dispense the abortion pill mifepristone for the first time, under a new rule change by the Biden administration, announced by the FDA.

Patients currently obtain mifepristone - part of a two-drug regimen that is safe and effective in inducing abortion - in person from a health provider.

A prescription is still required

under the new rule, but patients can now pick up the pill in-store or by mail order.

The move could significantly expand access to abortion through medication with demand increasing after a controversial Supreme Court decision.

The Department of Justice also paved the way for the US Postal Service to continue delivering prescription abortion medication.

New Products

- **Opicapone (Ongentys)** is a peripheral, selective and reversible catechol-O-methyltransferase (COMT) inhibitor endowed with a high binding affinity (sub-picomolar) that translates into a slow complex dissociation rate constant and a long duration of action (>24 hours) *in vivo*. In the presence of a DOPA decarboxylase inhibitor (DDCI), COMT becomes the major metabolising enzyme for levodopa, catalysing its conversion to 3-O-methyldopa (3-OMD) in the brain and periphery. In patients taking levodopa and a peripheral DDCI, such as carbidopa or benserazide, opicapone increases levodopa plasma levels thereby improving the clinical response to levodopa. *Ongentys is indicated as adjunctive therapy to preparations of levodopa/ DDCIs in adult patients with Parkinson's disease and end-of-dose motor fluctuations who cannot be stabilised on those combinations.* Ongentys is contraindicated in pheochromocytoma, paraganglioma, or other catecholamine secreting neoplasms; history of neuroleptic malignant syndrome and/or non-traumatic rhabdomyolysis; and concomitant use with monoamine oxidase (MAO-A and MAO-B) inhibitors (e.g. phenelzine, tranylcypromine and moclobemide) other than those for the treatment of Parkinson's disease. Ongentys capsules contain opicapone 50 mg and are available in packs of 30.

New Indications

- **Durvalumab (Imfinzi)** now has provisional approval, in combination with pemetrexed and either cisplatin or carboplatin, for the first-line treatment of patients with unresectable malignant pleural mesothelioma with epithelioid histology.
- **Migalastat (hydrochloride) (Galafold)** is now indicated for long-term treatment of adult and adolescent patients 12 years and older with a confirmed diagnosis of Fabry disease (α -galactosidase A deficiency) and who have an amenable mutation.
- **Pembrolizumab (Keytruda)** is now indicated for the adjuvant treatment of adult and adolescent (12 years and older) patients with Stage IIB, IIC, or III melanoma who have undergone complete resection.
- **Zanubrutinib (Brukinsa)** now has provisional approval for the treatment of adult patients with marginal zone lymphoma who have received at least one prior anti-CD20-based therapy.

New Contraindications

- **Captopril (Capoten)** is now contraindicated with concomitant use of aliskiren-containing products in patients with diabetes mellitus or renal impairment (GFR < 60 ml/min/1.73 m²); and with concomitant sacubitril/valsartan therapy (captopril must not be initiated earlier than 36 hours after the last dose of sacubitril/valsartan).
- **Ropinirole (hydrochloride) (Repreve)** is now contraindicated in severe renal impairment (creatinine clearance < 30 mL/min) without regular haemodialysis; and severe hepatic impairment.

Safety Related Changes

- **Meningococcal oligosaccharide conjugate a, c, y and w-135 vaccine (Menveo)** is no longer available in any presentations containing dry natural rubber, so it is no longer contraindicated in known hypersensitivity to latex.

This list is a summary of only some of the changes that have occurred over the last month. Before prescribing, always refer to the full product information.