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Push to lower discount rate in budget

MEDICINES Australia has used its budget submission to remind the Government of its commitment to lower Australia's high discount rate for vaccines and medicines.

A discount rate is a technical correction applied to medicines and vaccines that values immediate health effects higher than long-term health benefits, such as childhood vaccines.

This means preventative and curative vaccines and treatments are disadvantaged and delayed by a rate that is higher in Australia than other comparable countries.

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee acknowledged Australia's discount rate could be reduced for medicines and vaccines.

Medicines Australia CEO, Elizabeth de Somer, said Australia's discount rate has not been adjusted since it was set in the 1990s and needs to be reduced to meet today's international standards. "Medicines, vaccines and



treatments help Australians live longer, healthier lives.

"They keep people out of hospitals, in the workforce and contributing to our economy," de Somer said.

"For example, a recent peer-reviewed study shows the COVID-19 vaccines reduced the pandemic's economic toll in Australia by an estimated \$214b.

"Medicines and health technologies have dramatically transformed in the last 30 years, providing patients with longer-term health benefits and even curing some diseases.

"Left unchanged, there is a risk

that Australia's high discount rate will contribute to a lag in patient access to cutting edge therapies and impact the long-term health of future generations.

"Under Medicines Australia's Strategic Agreement with the Government, a reduction to the discount rate should have been implemented by Jul 2022.

"It is important for this overdue policy change to be implemented immediately, she said.

"Medicines Australia is again reiterating its call to lower Australia's discount rate from 5% to 1.5% for vaccines and 3% for other medicines, to recognise the value of preventative and longer-term treatments and cures.

"The Government and the medicines industry share the goal to reduce the time it takes for a patient to access the medicines they need on the PBS.

"A reduced discount rate is an opportunity to move closer to achieving this goal," she concluded.

Gold standard

THE Living Heart Project has used new technology to keep hearts viable for longer, the ABC reported.

It's called hypothermic ex vivo perfusion and can sustain a heart for eight hours and 47 mins.

How do you safeguard your business and patient data from cybercrime?



VIEW GUIDE

FRED

MoleMap AI use

MELANOMA diagnostic service MoleMap plans to use its AI algorithm to help screen patients in the early stages of melanoma, rolling the technology out to its 50 clinics in New Zealand and potentially its Australian sites.

Amy Page heads PSA's Victorian branch

DR AMY Page FPS has been appointed as the President of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's (PSA) Victorian branch.

Page is a consultant pharmacist and has served on the PSA Victoria branch since 2017 including as Vice-President.

"The Victorian Government has announced a trial allowing pharmacists to prescribe antibiotics for urinary tract infections and medicines for

other conditions, giving our profession the opportunity to take the first steps in practising to the top of scope," Page said.

"I'm excited to have a greater role in supporting PSA to be the home of accreditation.

"The 2023 Consultant Pharmacists Conference in May will be a fantastic opportunity to connect with accredited pharmacists and learn from one another," Page concluded.

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news.

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Dispensary Corner



A LITERALLY groundbreaking study in the USA has found that ants can be trained to sniff out cancerous tumours.

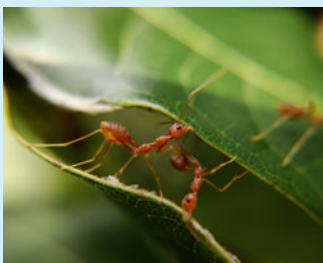
A paper published last week in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* journal reported on the proof-of-concept trial, in which the six-legged creatures were able to differentiate between the smell of urine from healthy mice and from mice with cancerous tumours.

Titled *Ants act as olfactory bio-detectors of tumours in patient-derived xenograft mice*, the report noted that tumour cells are characterised by specific volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that can be used as cancer biomarkers.

Incredibly, the training took about 10 minutes, after which the ants spent about 20% more time in the vicinity of the learned odour.

"Our study demonstrates that ants reliably detect tumour cues in mice urine and have the potential to act as efficient and inexpensive cancer bio-detectors," the authors from the Institut Curie in Paris wrote.

Further trials are now planned to broaden the results and hopefully show that ants can have a similar success in detecting cancer in humans.



Obesity adds to frailty

CARRYING far too much weight, including a midriff bulge, from mid-life onwards, is linked to a heightened risk of physical frailty in older age, research published in the journal *BMJ Open* has found.

Frailty is often wrongly perceived as a purely wasting disorder, said the researchers, who emphasised the importance of keeping trim throughout adulthood to help minimise the risk.

Mounting evidence suggests that obese older adults may be at increased risk because obesity aggravates the age-related decline in muscle strength, aerobic capacity, and physical function.

But few studies have tracked weight changes and frailty risk over the long term.

The researchers, therefore, drew on participants in the population-based Tromsø Study to find out whether general body mass index (BMI) and abdominal obesity

separately and jointly, might affect the risk of pre-frailty/frailty.

Those who were obese in 1994, assessed by BMI alone, were nearly 2.5 times more likely to be pre-frail/frail at the end of the monitoring period than those with a normal BMI.

Similarly, those with a moderately-high or high-waist circumference to start off with, were, respectively, 57% and twice as likely, to be pre-frail/frail than those with a normal waistline.

Those who started off with a normal BMI but moderately-high waist circumference, or who were overweight but had a normal waistline, weren't significantly more likely to be pre-frail/frail at the end of the monitoring period.

But those who were both obese and who had a moderately-high waist circumference at the start of the monitoring period were.

Learn more **HERE**.

Clock up sleep in teens to ward off MS

INSUFFICIENT and disturbed sleep during the teenage years may heighten the subsequent risk of multiple sclerosis (MS), suggests a case-control study published online in the *Journal of Neurology Neurosurgery & Psychiatry*.

Clocking up enough hours of restorative sleep while young may help to ward off the condition, suggested the researchers.

To explore this further, the researchers drew on a population-based case-control study, the Epidemiological Investigation of Multiple Sclerosis, comprising 16 70-year-old Swedish residents.

Compared with sleeping seven to nine hrs per night during the teenage years, short sleep of less than seven hrs was associated with a 40% heightened risk of getting MS subsequently, after accounting for potentially influential factors, including BMI at age 20 and smoking.

But long sleep, including at weekends or on free days, wasn't linked with a heightened MS risk.

Changes in sleep timing between work or school days and weekends or free days didn't seem to be influential.

The researchers said the findings should be interpreted cautiously.

Learn more **HERE**.

Call for preceptors

THE University of New South Wales (UNSW) is looking for passionate community pharmacy preceptors for the student placement program.

The Pharmacy Guild explained that this is an opportunity for pharmacists to build relationships with students, and learn more about the UNSW Faculty of Medicine and Health's new integrated Bachelor/Master Pharmacy program.

The one-day observation placement (eight hrs) will take place for the first year Bachelor students between Jun and Aug.

Community pharmacy may be allocated a student from the Pharmacy program, and/or, if they wish, a student from an allied health program (nutrition/physiotherapy/exercise science) seeking an inter-professional experience.

For further information about the UNSW Student Placement program, contact the Work Integrated Learning Officer, Flora Guo at mh.sohswil@unsw.edu.au.

Register your interest by completing the Placement Offer Form by 14 Feb **HERE**.

Regulatory alert

THE Pharmacy Guild has given a regulatory reminder to pharmacists that the source of faxed or emailed prescriptions received should come directly from a prescriber.

Fraudsters can create fake emails to mimic practice emails.

Always be sure to double check, and be wary of prescriptions from Gmail or Yahoo mail addresses.

Patient-sent scripts are not legal.

CRAMPEZE

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SANE points to 'shameful snapshot'

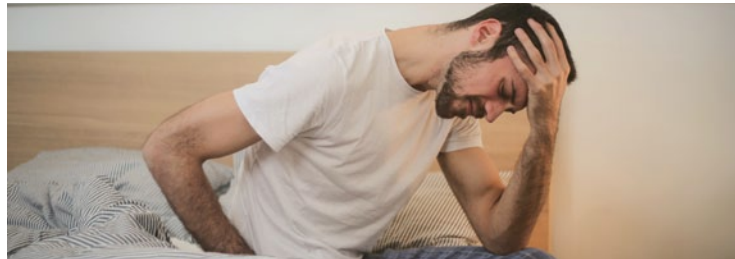
A NEW survey of 1,000 people affected by persistent and severe mental illness and trauma gives a "shameful snapshot of a system that fails to be affordable, accessible or adequate," said SANE, the national organisation representing Australians affected by complex mental health.

SANE presented these findings at the Federal Government Forum on mental health access and equity yesterday.

Respondents revealed that growing gap payments for psychological and psychiatric services, and a complex National Disability Insurance Scheme pathway, has resulted in a large number of people not receiving any form of mental health support.

The majority of respondents were living with three or more diagnoses, yet many were struggling to access basic mental healthcare through an overburdened public system, the survey found.

The revelation that 23% have been turned away from services because their needs are too complex reinforces recent data showing increases in mental health presentations at already crowded hospital emergency departments.



SANE CEO, Rachel Green said those affected have been forgotten, and initiatives like Better Access need to be driven by those with lived experience rather than mental health providers and policy makers.

"The Better Access initiative has always been a blunt tool to provide universal care for the majority and hasn't adequately supported those with complex mental health needs.

"This SANE Bridging the Gaps Survey demonstrates that addressing wait lists and excessive gap payments is one element in the need for a system overhaul and a Federal Government commitment to supporting those with complex and ongoing needs," Green said.

Key findings from the SANE Bridging the Gaps Survey included that 11% are not receiving any form of mental health support because they cannot afford it; 40%

of respondents are not accessing any psychological care and more than 50% said they needed more access to psychology; 63% have three or more diagnosed mental health conditions that require more than one mental health professional but 34% have access to only one; 23% have been turned away from services because their needs are too complex; 85% are not receiving NDIS services; and one in three psychologists have closed their books to new patients and the median gap co-payment for psychological care has increased to \$90 per session.

"We need better options, where access to support meets needs and provides opportunities for comprehensive early intervention and continuity of support - rather than being skewed towards those with the ability to pay," said Green.

You can't run away from problems

WHILE running has plenty of physical and mental health benefits, doing it as an escape from your daily stresses can lead to exercise dependence, according to international research.

The Norwegian researchers interviewed recreational runners about their relationship with running to find out how commonly they were using it as a

form of escapism, and how that was impacting their wellbeing.

They say those whose way of seeking out escapism was about seeking positive experiences generally had better wellbeing, while those who were running as a form of escape from negative experiences and feelings generally had more negative wellbeing.

Learn more [HERE](#).

Sport parenting

PARENTS increased their involvement with children's sport activities during the COVID-19 pandemic - but new research shows that associated stresses had many parents considering the extent of their continued involvement.

Sports bodies need to rethink parental involvement and the stresses around youth sport. Learn more [HERE](#).

Guild Update

Last chance to save on APP registration

YOU have until midnight tonight (Tue 31 Jan) to register for this year's APP Conference at the early bird rate, saving you up to \$120.

Organisers of APP, which is being held at the Gold Coast on 23-26 Mar, say the early bird registration includes access to all conference sessions and recordings, the Trade Exhibition, Welcome Reception and the exciting APP Street Party!

The other big news is that renowned thought-leader on customer experience, Amanda Stevens, is returning to APP.

Organisers say, "Stevens will outline for conference delegates a plan to create a brand that customers willingly and enthusiastically rave about".

Conference Convenor, Kos Slavos AM, said that Stevens' presentation fits perfectly into the conference theme of 'Engage, Explore, Evolve'.

"Amanda is well-known within the pharmacy industry for combining current consumer insights with fascinating research into buying behaviour," Slavos said.

There will be more than 100 Australian and international speakers featured at the four-day event.

To find out more information about the APP 2023 conference and your last chance to secure early bird registration, [click here](#).