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Pharmacy split on COVID testing role

PHARMACY leaders are divided on the merits of the Queensland Government's decision to launch a pharmacy-based COVID-19 testing trial (*PD* 12 Aug).

Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) National President, Dr Chris Freeman, has warned the proposed trial sends out "the wrong message" to patients, while Pharmacy Guild of Australia Queensland Branch Director, Gerard Benedet, said it would facilitate opportunistic testing.

"We have continually asked members of the community not to enter a pharmacy if they are unwell and displaying COVID-19 symptoms," Freeman said.

"The concern is that this decision will put not only pharmacists at risk but those with chronic health conditions who regularly visit a pharmacy and are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19.

"The Queensland Government did not consult broadly with pharmacists and pharmacy groups

and we do not want people who potentially have COVID-19 wandering into a pharmacy to get tested."

Freeman added that while pharmacists have the skills to triage and screen patients, "there are a raft of problems to work through before this service could be safely offered to patients".

"It is essential that there is effective infection control and personal protective equipment available for healthcare workers running this service, and guidance similar to that which exists for GP respiratory clinics conducting COVID-19 testing would need to be adopted," he said.

"Pharmacists and pharmacy staff must be protected... or it places their communities' ongoing access to medicines and expert pharmacist care at risk."

However, responding to Freeman's comments Benedet told Queensland Premier, Anastacia Palaszczuk, and Health Minister, Steven Miles, that the trial "send the right message", in a Twitter post published last night.

"If you walk in and ask for cold and flu medicine it makes sense to offer a test given the symptoms



are similar."

Speaking with *Pharmacy Daily* after a meeting with Queensland Health, Guild Queensland Branch President, Trent Twomey, said the State's trial would draw on the protocols used in the South Australian pilot (*PD* 20 Jul).

Twomey said that while the Queensland program would be open to all QCPP accredited pharmacies in the state, but stressed it would not be compulsory.

He added the trial would not necessarily see pharmacists conducting tests in-store.

"They'll let us do things like car park testing, rather than having people in store," he said.



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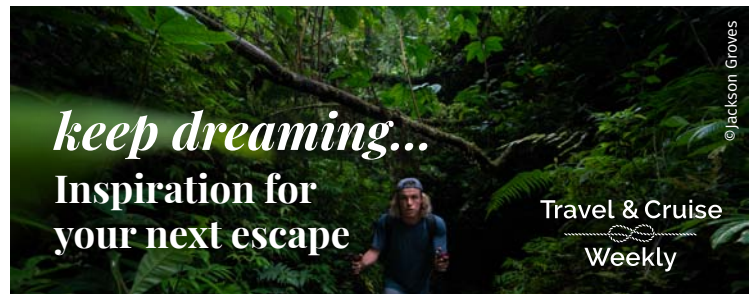
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COVID hits Vic pharmacy

AHS Tatura Pharmacy was forced to close for deep cleaning this week after a staff member tested positive for COVID-19.

In a Facebook post the pharmacy noted the staff member had been wearing personal protective equipment and “had taken all hygiene practices in line with national guidelines on infection control”, and had minimal contact with patients during their most recent shifts last week.

“While we are providing you with updates as we can, we would appreciate any questions to be directed to messenger rather than any rumours circulating,” the pharmacy’s post said.

PPA questions value of location rules

PHARMACY owners are “raking in profits and literally fencing off their industry from competition”, while employee pharmacists earn the lowest hourly rate of any health worker, union group, Professional Pharmacists Australia (PPA) claims.

Responding to criticism of medicines pricing raised in a series of articles published across *News Corp* titles earlier this week (*PD* 10 Aug), PPA criticised the \$18 billion Seventh Community Pharmacy Agreement (7CPA) and the Federal Government’s decision to remove the sunset clause on the Pharmacy Location Rules.

Long-servicing PPA President, Geoff March, said the 7CPA and the location rules “serve a very narrow set of special interests”.

“The power of special interest groups in Canberra is never clearer than the case of the Pharmacy

Guild of Australia and the location rules approved by the Federal Government which act like a protection racket for the richest and most powerful pharmacy owners,” he said.

“What the rules do, is to ban new pharmacies from setting up within 1.5 kilometres of an existing pharmacy business.

“It stifles competition, increasing prices and makes it nearly impossible for working pharmacists to start their own business, locking them in a cycle of low paid work.

“This is one of the main reasons that almost half of all working pharmacists are considering leaving the profession or have already decided to do so based on latest research.”

March said the current community pharmacy system was overly focused on the supply of



medicines “rather than focusing on care”.

“Employee community pharmacists know far more can be done with the over \$18 billion-dollar investment by taxpayers into pharmacy but there is little realistic opportunity for these staff to ever open their own business or provide care under the current model,” he said.

NSW pharmacists back Vic colleagues

MEMBERS of the Westmead Hospital Pharmacy Department shared their support for pharmacists on the frontline of the Victorian COVID-19 crisis, in a video posted on social media this morning, by the hospital’s Director of Pharmacy, David Ng.

The two-minute long video features members of the NSW hospital’s pharmacy team holding up messages acknowledging the work hospital pharmacists in Victoria have been doing to ensure patients

have access to treatments.

“Thinking of you all during this tough time,” one message said.

“You’re all doing an amazing job,” another sign read.

“Look after yourselves and your family,” said another.

Other messages encouraged pharmacy workers to “remember to rest and relax”, to “be kind to one another”, to “hang in there”, to “stay connected digitally”, and to “stay strong and stay safe”.

[CLICK HERE](#) to see the video.

Pharmacy staff a priority for COVID tests

COMMUNITY pharmacy workers are now on the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services’ (DHHS) list of essential workers eligible for priority COVID-19 testing.

The move comes after several weeks of campaigning by Pharmacy Guild of Australia Victorian Branch President, Anthony Tassone, and sees pharmacy workers listed alongside other front-line health, aged care, and emergency services employees.

The decision to list pharmacy workers as being eligible for priority testing on the DHHS website aims to clarify confusion witnessed at testing centres.

In a post on Twitter, Tassone welcomed the move to ensure COVID test results of pharmacy staff are processed as a priority. “Better late than never,” he said.

“Hopefully this can be applied consistently at testing centre level to minimise any unnecessary delays for community pharmacy staff returning to work.”

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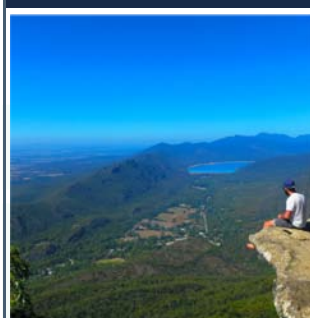


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ConPharm 2020

THE Australian Association of Consultant Pharmacy (AAPC) has announced its ConPharm 2020 program is now available online.

With COVID-19 restrictions forcing the cancellation of the planned event in Adelaide in Jun, AAPC has produced more than 26 hours of accredited group two CPD content, which is available online.

CLICK HERE for more.

Win with Soodox

This week Pharmacy Daily & Soodox are giving away a bottle of their Soodox™ Vytal Antibacterial Hand Wash worth RRP \$9.95

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Slight increases forecast

ALMOST 80% of prospective pharmacy buyers and sellers are expecting store sale prices to remain static or rise “slightly” over the next 12 months, a report from Attain Business Brokers reveals.

The Attain Pharmacy Market Sentiment Survey found 42.5% of respondents believed that there will be a small increase in pharmacy prices in the year ahead, with just over 1% predicting significant growth.

Close to 20% of respondents said they believe prices will fall in the 2020/21 Financial Year, while 37% believe the market will “stay flat”.

The report released by Attain Director, Natalie Sirianni, also found close to one-in-three pharmacy owners (31%) in July said that they were looking to sell at least one store within the next five years, while 14% plan to bring in a junior partner rather than selling out completely.

Personal and family circumstances



were touted as the main influencing factors for selling up (83%), while the Community Pharmacy Agreement cycle (31%) and business partners’ opinions (28%) were also major issues behind “sale timing”, the report found.

For those looking to buy, “finding a pharmacy that meets my criteria” was seen as the most challenging issue, while more than 50% of respondents noted accessing capital and current pricing levels as barriers to buying.

Pharmacy critical to patient safety: FIP

PHARMACISTS around the world are demonstrating their value in supporting quality use of medicines, the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) reports.

Releasing a new reference document, *Patient safety - Pharmacists’ role in Medication Without Harm*, University of Sydney Professor of Medicines Use Optimisation, Parisa Aslani, said the profession had a key role to play in promoting patient safety at an individual patient level, as well as at organisational and policy development levels.

“Medication safety has become a global emergency and many

nations are placing it on their national health priority agendas,” she said.

“Regardless of whether pharmacists provide direct or indirect patient care, they all have a role in promoting safe and quality health care.

“We can learn a lot from each other, and this reference paper is a personal and professional challenge to all pharmacists to keep patient safety at the forefront of practice and to take new steps towards safer care.

“We all are advocates of patient safety. As pharmacists, we are particular advocates of medication safety.”



Dispensary Corner

DREAMS of pursuing careers in healthcare were dashed for several British school-leavers as the COVID-19 pandemic deprived them of their opportunity to shine in state exams.

Instead of sitting their A-Levels, English students were graded using an algorithm that calculated each student’s result based on their past work, trial exam results and their school’s past performance, with students across the country seeing their grades slump significantly.

One aspiring medical student reported that he had received a B and two C grades, a massive drop from the three A grades he had landed during his trial exams earlier this year, and leaving him short of the marks required for his preferred course at King’s College London.

The results, which were released earlier this week have seen British universities scramble to readjust their entry requirements “to take account of the extraordinary circumstances,” *inews.co.uk* reported.

The publication also noted that students from poorer backgrounds saw a “greater downward adjustment” to their grades than those from more affluent areas.

