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Could ATAGI advice hit pharmacies?

IT IS too early to tell what impact, if any, new advice regarding the rollout of the AstraZeneca (AZ) COVID-19 vaccines in patients under 50 years will have for community pharmacists.

Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, told **Pharmacy Daily** that the organisation was yet to hear about any changes to the planned Phase 2a rollout of the national COVID-19 vaccination campaign through pharmacies, following the Australian Technical Advisory

Group on Immunisation's (ATAGI's) recommendations last night.

ATAGI issued the advice after evidence emerged linking the AZ vaccine with incidence of thrombosis with thrombocytopenia, in one in every 250,000 patients.

"The specific advice from ATAGI is that people under the age of 50 years should be offered Pfizer (Comirnaty) as a preference," Twomey said.

"However they can still be offered the AstraZeneca vaccine

if the benefits outweigh the risk for the individual and they have been able to make a fully informed decision.

"As of this morning the Guild has not been provided additional information relating to the Phase 2a rollout."

While pharmacies are expected to join the campaign from Phase 2a, the new advice could have a greater impact on the sector's involvement in Phase 2b, which will include people aged 18 to 49 years, with the AZ vaccine currently the only option approved for use in community pharmacies.

In a joint statement issued last night, Department of Health Secretary, Professor Brendan Murphy, and the Chief Medical Officer, Paul Kelly, noted incidence of the blood-clotting syndrome was "very rare".

"The decision by the Government to accept the ATAGI advice will have implications for the vaccine rollout program," they said.

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Flu vax advances

GUILD Learning and Development is partnering with vaccine manufacturer, Seqirus, to develop a new training course titled *Influenza vaccines: now and future advances*.

The Australian Pharmacy Council accredited program aims to increase pharmacists' confidence in both recommending and providing advice on the flu vaccine, including Seqirus' cell-based vaccines, which are being rolled out in Australia for the first time this year.

The module has been approved for 0.75 hours of Group 1 CPD, which can be converted to 0.75 hours of Group 2 CPD on completion of relevant assessments.

CLICK HERE for more.

AHPRA extends sub-register to 2022

AUSTRALIA'S pandemic response sub-register of recently retired health practitioners, including 1,936 pharmacists, will remain in place until 06 Apr 2022, to support the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines.

The move was announced yesterday by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) after a request from the Federal Government, and came a week after the Pharmacy Board of Australia had said the sub-register would close on 19 Apr.

The extended sub-register will only feature pharmacists, medical practitioners, nurses, midwives and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners.

AHPRA CEO, Martin Fletcher, said the decision reflected the effectiveness of the sub-register's contribution to the national COVID-19 pandemic response.



"Practitioners on the sub-register are a valued part of supporting the Australian community during the pandemic, particularly for the COVID-19 vaccination program," he said.

"We acknowledge this and support the Government's request to keep the sub-register open for up to 12 months more."

Pharmacists who are on the sub-register, who have not applied to transition to the main register of practitioners are limited to practice only to help with the COVID-19 vaccination rollout.

Practitioners on the sub-register do not need to do anything to remain on it and do not have to pay fees.

NSAIDs top paracetamol for back pain

RESEARCHERS from RMIT University's School of Health and Biomedical Sciences have found patients with low back pain had better outcomes using non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) analgesics than paracetamol.

RMIT Senior Lecturer in Pharmacy, Dr Vincent Chan, said pharmacists had a key role to play in advising them about the most appropriate medication to use to manage low back pain.

"Paracetamol may reduce the severity of symptoms but does

not aid the inflammation in the surrounding muscle layers that worsen low back pain," he said.

"NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen, reduce inflammation and minimise the risk of acute cases becoming chronic.

"As most patients presenting with low back pain are treated with over the counter analgesics, Australian pharmacists have an important role to play in influencing effective management of acute low back pain by following recommendations made in guidelines."

Wizard Pharmacy extends RAC deal

ROYAL Automobile Club of Western Australia (RAC) members will continue to access benefits when shopping at Wizard Pharmacy stores until at least 2025.

The two organisations agreed to a new four-year partnership, extending their original deal, which started in Apr 2019, securing RAC members a 5% discount on purchases at any Wizard Pharmacy or through the group's online store.

Wizard Pharmacy Chief Operating Officer Sally Parker

said the group was excited to extend and strengthen the relationship between two WA brands.

"RAC is one of WA's most trusted brands, and we share a common purpose which is to make life better for all West Australians," she said.

We are also excited about the opportunity our continued partnership represents to continue delivering greater value to our Franchise Partners and future growth for our pharmacies."



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Dispensary Corner

THIS time last year brewers and distillers were switching their production lines to fight COVID-19, now one Kentucky bourbon brand is working with a local pharmacy group to support with the vaccination rollout.

The Bard Distillery is lending its ultra-cold freezers so Poole's Pharmacy Care can store Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine.

Pharmacist, Ron Poole, said that having access to the freezer has allowed the group to "get quite a bit of Pfizer in" and store it in a central location.

We just hope no one mixes up a vial of the vaccine with a shot of bourbon.



NSW vax centre plan makes no sense

PLANS to operate a mass vaccination clinic at Sydney's Olympic Park are being criticised by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia.

The NSW Government aims to have the centre operational by the middle of next month to complement existing clinics and double the State's current vaccination capacity.

However, Guild National President, Trent Twomey, said the move made no sense.

"We don't accept the mass vaccination in footy stadiums idea as announced this week by the NSW Government," he said.

"It doesn't make sense to send thousands into a footy stadium increasing the risk of community transmission, as opposed to patients booking at their local pharmacy down the road from home.

"That's a lot safer and more convenient for everyone.

"In terms of the advice about vaccines, our advice from the Australian Government Department of Health is that the issue is about supply.

"COVID-19 vaccines are the responsibility of the



Commonwealth Government.

"We have received repeated assurances this week from the Australian Government that community pharmacies will be providing COVID-19 vaccines as part of Phase 2a.

"We expect those pharmacies who expressed an interest to receive further advice on the next steps from the PPA on Mon."

Twomey noted the success of pharmacy-based vaccination services, including Australian influenza vaccine campaigns and ongoing COVID-19 immunisation

programs in the US.

"We've seen in the US that the most successful rollout has been in West Virginia where they've gone with the local pharmacy option as the vaccination provider," he said.

"We understand and support the Government's vaccine rollout strategy, but if we want to move to a rapid rollout of COVID-19 vaccination, it makes sense that they use our national network of healthcare professionals. In at least 60 towns around Australia we are the only primary healthcare provider in town."



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