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PPE not being delivered

PHARMACY owners in Sydney's COVID-19 hotspots are facing multiple challenges including workforce shortages and a lack of access to government-funded personal protective equipment (PPE), as they commence the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations.

Pharmacy Guild of Australia NSW Branch President, David Heffernan, told *Pharmacy Daily* that many pharmacy owners were being forced to put their hands in their pockets to purchase PPE, "despite the taxpayer paying for a stockpile for those hot zones".

"It's not being delivered to pharmacies," he said.

"It's an absolute outrage after all those rivers of gold have been fed into Primary Care Networks that aren't even organised.

"It's a seven-day turnaround to get a handful of masks for 50-odd staff in some cases.

"It's pretty pathetic, but it's another thing we're trying to deal with and trying to fix for other agencies that ought to have it in place especially when they're getting thrown such vast sums of money."

With the vaccination rollout getting underway in a number of

pharmacies in Sydney yesterday, Heffernan noted that there was a need to clarify issues around staff in PPE being designated as close contacts in the event that a patient who has been vaccinated in store subsequently is confirmed as having been COVID-positive at the time.

"What's the point of wearing PPE if then NSW Health calls and you are deemed a close contact?" he asked.

"We're facing a potential workforce crisis if some of the red tape isn't removed.

"We've got pharmacies that have shut their doors because they can't afford people to walk in and close the business down.

"Others who have stayed open are finding it hard because their staff are running thin.

"They're small businesses and small businesses don't have a B-team sitting on the shelf ready to deploy in the case of a pandemic."

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features five pages of news plus a full page from **Willach Pharmacy**.

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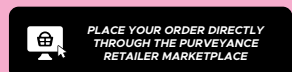
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Rego numbers top 35k for first time

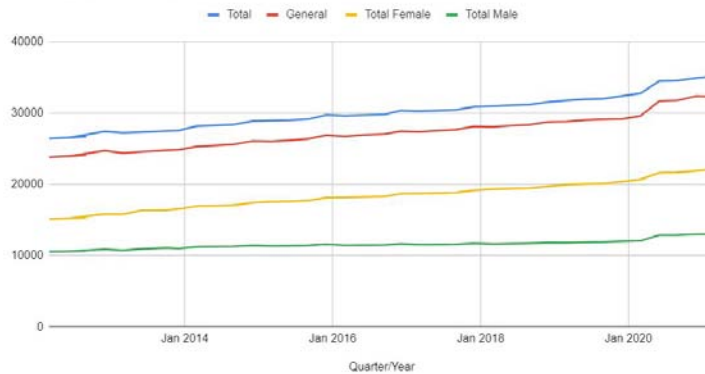
PHARMACIST registration numbers surpassed the 35,000 mark for the first time in the three months to Mar 2021, data from the Pharmacy Board of Australia reveals.

However, despite the record number of registrants (35,182, an increase of 260 on Dec 2020) the Board figures show a decline in the number holding general registration (down by 81 to 32,313) after three years of growth.

While there were reductions in the number of both male and female pharmacists with general registration there was a higher proportion of men (71) dropping it than women (10).

The latest Board numbers revealed a nominal decline in the number of pharmacists aged 25 to 29 years who held general registration, while the numbers of general registrants over the age of 65 fell for the first time since Mar 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Pharmacy registration data for Total numbers, General registration and by gender from Mar 2012 to Mar 2021



However, the number of octogenarians with general registration (257) remains close to Dec's all time high of 269.

The Board's Emergency Pandemic Register also fell a fraction, from 1,936 in Dec 2020 to 1,933 in the latest quarterly results.

Having jumped slightly in the Dec 2020 period (to 1,118), the number of non-practising

registrants slipped back to 1,070 - well down on the record high of 1,354 seen in Dec 2019.

The profession's gender balance has remained just shy of being two female pharmacists for every male, with the ACT having the highest ratio of female registrants (66.7%), while Tasmania had the highest proportion of male pharmacists registered with the Board (38.7%).

Prepping PAs for COVAX rollout

PHARMACY assistants (PAs) are set to play a significant part in the national COVID-19 vaccination (COVAX) rollout, Australian College of Pharmacy CEO, Dr Dimitri Kopanakis, believes.

In response to the Federal Government's decision to invite community pharmacies - including stores that did not participate in the expression of interest process - the College is offering free access to its *Safe vaccination services in community pharmacy program*.

"The training enables PAs to support pharmacist immunisers so they can then focus on providing patients with the COVAX and answering their questions," Kopanakis said.

The course also covers logistical aspects to minimise disruption to the pharmacy.

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ACCC ticks formula pact

THE Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has re-authorised the agreement between infant formula manufacturers and importers which prohibits them from promoting baby formula directly to the public.

The *Marketing in Australia of Infant Formula: Manufacturers and Importers Agreement* has been authorised until 31 Jul 2024 after the ACCC accepted it would "continue to ensure important restrictions on the promotion of breastmilk substitutes".

However the ACCC said it was concerned that marketing of toddler milk products was significantly undermining the pact's effectiveness, and urged the Department of Health to consider the promotion of such items in a broader review due to be undertaken this year.

Workforce shortages worst in years

AUSTRALIA'S pharmacy sector is enduring its worst workforce shortage in decades with recruiters struggling to fill positions in stores across regional, rural and metropolitan areas.

With close to 20 years' experience in the pharmacy sector, Raven's Recruitment General Manager Australia and New Zealand, Heidi Dariz, told *Pharmacy Daily* that owners in some areas have been unable to attract candidates despite offering significantly above Award rates.

"I started at Raven's in 2002 and we had shortages then," she said.

"But this is worse than what I saw then, I've never seen it this bad."

Dariz noted the emergence of new pharmacy programs in the mid to late 2000s created an oversupply of pharmacists, which has subsequently suppressed wages and driven some out of the profession.

"At first they were leaving to go

to hospital pharmacy, because it's better paid," she said.

"But now they're getting out altogether.

"It's frightening what I'm seeing - obviously in the rural areas we've always had it tough, but now it's virtually impossible.

"And we're seeing it in the cities as well - sometimes we have locum roles in Brisbane, Sydney or Melbourne and we can't fill them."

Dariz said the workforce shortages have been exacerbated by the impacts of COVID-19, particularly when it comes to getting locums.

"We've got the shortages, we've got people leaving the industry, and then COVID on top of that," she said.

"I had an emergency situation on Sun night, a guy rang me out in rural Queensland at about 9pm and said, 'my pharmacist has broken his leg, can you get someone here tomorrow morning'?"



"I've got 500 [Queensland-based locum] pharmacists on my database, I bulk emailed the whole lot - [and] didn't have one to go there.

"A lot of the problem is we've a pool of 10 or 15 [locums] that we work with for emergency-type situations, but they're working on other emergencies, because people are close contacts, they've been somewhere like a Kmart or Bunnings and they've got to isolate for 14 days, so I've got emergency locums working their shifts."

Set Up for Success: COVAX in Community Pharmacy

Join Pharmacy Platform for a live Q&A panel session on how to run a successful COVID-19 vaccination clinic.

In our LIVE Q&A webinar, we will cover:

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- Lessons and experiences from pharmacists who have been providing COVID-19 vaccinations successfully
- Tips on how to prepare your pharmacy and manage workflow
- Pharmaceutical Defence Limited's take on AstraZeneca guidance to vaccinating patients under 60 years old
- Live Q&A session with industry experts



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PHARMACY
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Words matter to health literacy

PHARMACISTS need to use their communication and counselling skills honed through undergraduate training to develop strategies to boost patients' health literacy, Monash University Senior Research Fellow, Gergory Duncan, believes.

Speaking during a webinar on Sat discussing health literacy, hosted by the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP), Duncan urged pharmacists to ask questions of patients to ensure they have understood information.

Studies had found some pharmacists describing the approach as "quite awkward" and were concerned that by questioning patients they may feel judged, he said.

However, Duncan said such concerns could be overcome by rethinking questions, so patients do not feel like they are being put on the spot.

"It's really around how we frame

it, we need to make sure we sit our responsibility for any errors that come through on us, so we frame our question around that," he said.

"Instead of [saying] 'tell me how you're going to take this medication at home', it would be something like, 'just to make sure I haven't missed any important points can you explain back to me how you're going to use this medicine?'"

"So if they don't get it right it's the pharmacist's fault, and we're not judging the patient.

"Often that feels unnatural when we engage with people, so it's important that we practise, that we start to find our natural voice - what feels right to you and what you observe that patients respond well to."

Duncan said that the challenges of poor health literacy were "quite pervasive" in society, adding that pharmacists needed to be aware

that a patient's ability to process health information can vary in different circumstances, "we need to keep that in mind when we engage with people," he said.

"One of the challenges that we often come across when we talk about new services or approaching things in a different way is that we need to learn new skills.

"Importantly with health literacy most of us have all the skills we need - the communication skills that we practice as undergraduates are the basic skills that enhance that interaction with people, but it's about how we use them.

"We need to be consistent in the application [of health literacy strategies] not just saying 'I think this patient needs it so we'll do it for them.

"We actually need to have this structured systematic approach to engage with all of our patients to reduce risk."

New Guild mental health podcast

THE Pharmacy Guild of Australia's Pharmacy Business & Career Network has produced a special podcast called *Creating Mentally Healthy Pharmacies*.

Featuring National Mental Health Commission CEO Christine Morgan, the podcast discusses the vital importance of how pharmacies can establish and sustain a mentally healthy workplace and ways in which pharmacists can manage their own mental health as well as that of their colleagues.

Morgan is also National Suicide Prevention Adviser to Prime Minister Scott Morrison, with the Commission developing a range of guides for employers and staff.

Access the podcast [HERE](#).

New nifedipine labelling reflects risk

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration has advised health professionals that the Product Information for nifedipine has been updated to provide new information about the risk of acute pulmonary oedema, when used for the treatment of preterm labour in pregnancy.

Nifedipine, marketed under several brand names including Adalat, Adefin, Addos and APO-Nifedipine, is indicated for the management of chronic stable angina pectoris and vasospastic

angina pectoris due to coronary heart disease, as well as for the treatment of hypertension.

However the TGA has confirmed the receipt of four adverse event reports relating to off-label use in pregnancy, as a tocolytic agent (inhibiting myometrial smooth muscle contractions).

The relevant section of the PI has been updated to reflect the risk of oedema for intravenous pregnancy use, especially in cases of multiple pregnancy.

AHPPC updates schools advice re Delta

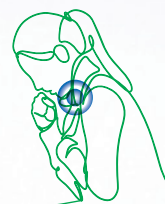
THE Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) has issued a new statement on minimising the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools, noting the rapid spread of the Delta variant in Australia.

"The higher transmissibility of this variant represents a potentially higher risk of transmission in schools and early childhood education and care, if there is local community transmission," the AHPPC said.

During closures vulnerable students and children of essential workers need to have continued access to onsite education, while boarding schools need plans in place to manage their response to different levels of COVID-19 disease in the community.

However "the same methods that have prevented the spread of COVID-19 so far will also prevent the spread of the Delta variant if applied consistently and with high compliance," the committee noted.

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Dispensary Corner

SOME people will do anything to start travelling again despite the COVID-19 pandemic - even a bit of cross-dressing!

That was the dangerous approach taken by a COVID-positive man in Indonesia, who pretended to be his wife in order to board a domestic flight this month between Jakarta and the island of Ternate in the remote North Maluku province.

The miscreant was carrying a fake ID as well as a falsified negative PCR test result in his wife's name - with the deception facilitated by having his face covered with a niqab.

However an observant flight attendant spotted him in a new identity after the passenger changed back to men's clothing in the aircraft lavatory, and alerted officials on the ground.

Police arrested him after the Citilink flight landed, and he was subsequently tested with a positive result and ordered to self-isolate at home.

"He bought the plane ticket with his wife's name, and brought the identity card, the PCR test result and the vaccination card with his wife's name," said Ternate police chief Aditya Laksimada.

Officers confirmed he will face formal prosecution once the quarantine period ends.

Indonesia is currently reporting about 50,000 COVID-19 cases per day, with strict flight restrictions in place particularly during the annual Eid holiday period including requirements for negative PCR test results before boarding.

Blooms blossoms in WA



BLOOMS The Chemist is continuing to grow its footprint in Western Australia, adding two pharmacies in Perth's southern suburb of Baldivis to its national network this month.

The group has more than 100 stores across NSW, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria, and WA, with the Baldivis and Baldivis Stockland pharmacies boosting the numbers in the west by 25%.

Pharmacy owner, Amy Owen, said she was excited to join the Blooms network and bring the brand's community-centric values to life.

"My working partner Dhruv Shah and I look forward to bringing Blooms The Chemist's values of integrity and respect, honesty and trust, passion and commitment to my local community in Baldivis," she said.

"Baldivis is a growing suburb with a true community atmosphere. Our friendly and hardworking teams across both stores are one big family with a passion for and strong commitment to improving the health outcomes of the Baldivis community."

Pictured, the Blooms the Chemist Baldivis team.

TGA to collaborate on meds regulation

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has released its *International Engagement Strategy 2021-2025*, with an eye to working closely with overseas regulators to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

The new strategy has identified four priorities:

- Global policy alignment.
- Pre-market global collaboration.
- Post-market global

monitoring.

- Regional regulatory capabilities.

The TGA noted that a globally aligned regulatory framework would reduce the burden on industry, while balancing the need to ensure products brought to market are of high quality, safe and effective.

The TGA strategy also focused on collaboration with international partners to share data to support decision-making.

Pharmacy Guild Update

Pharmacist key to Covax

THE announcement to allow all the 3,930 eligible community pharmacies across Australia to join the COVID-19 vaccination rollout is a significant step in improving vaccination rates and will see thousands of community pharmacies delivering vaccinations where they are most needed.

These pharmacies have undergone all the training and meet all the necessary criteria to provide this service for patients. To date a handful of pharmacies in regional, rural and remote areas have been able to provide COVID-19 vaccinations to patients.

But now patients across all of Australia will soon be able to access their COVID-19 vaccinations through their community pharmacy which is the most accessible health destination and often provides extended operating hours and access at weekends.

These pharmacies are fully indemnified by the Government and informed consent protocols will be followed for patients.

Including all eligible community pharmacies in the national vaccination strategy will have a marked impact on increasing the rate of vaccination delivery to communities across the country.

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