

Pharmacy model best for naloxone

LEGISLATIVE reforms allowing the supply of naloxone to occur directly to patients at needle and syringe programs services in Victoria are being welcomed, but the Pharmacy Guild of Australia believes safeguards are needed to ensure safe and effective use.

The Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment Bill 2020, was passed by the State Legislative Council yesterday, and will allow for needle exchange services to dispense naloxone directly to intravenous drug users, rather than redirecting them to a pharmacy with a voucher to receive State-funded naloxone.

Guild Victorian Branch President, Anthony Tassone, told **Pharmacy Daily**, that community pharmacies should be part of the naloxone distribution model.

"The Guild welcomes and supports measures that improve access to naloxone because it saves lives," he said.

"However, it is important that appropriate safeguards are in place to ensure its safe and effective use.

"Community pharmacies already play a significant role in harm minimisation that includes the supply of naloxone.



"However, the costs to patients remain a significant barrier, as the over-the-counter supply of naloxone from a pharmacy under Schedule 3 is not subsidised by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

"This should and must change to help assure patient access.

"A funded community pharmacy based model that supports the supply of naloxone in community pharmacies without the need of a voucher or other barrier to patient access should be part of the solution, particularly given that with a network of over 1,300 sites - community pharmacies are the most visited and accessible primary

health care destination in Victoria."

Victorian Legislative Council Government Whip, Nina Taylor, noted the current State requirements that naloxone must be supplied by a health professional were a "significant barrier" to access for many drug users.

"Feedback from harm reduction providers indicates that the rate of people who proceed to a pharmacy for their naloxone after first attending a needle and syringe program can be as low as 50%," she said.

"You can see how that is counterproductive in terms of what we are trying to achieve here."

Tylenol comes to Oz with TGA rego

JOHNSON & Johnson's paracetamol brand, Tylenol, is set to debut in Australia after it was registered with the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

The brand's paracetamol 500mg caplets will be available immediately, with pharmacists to gain access to children and baby formulations in Aug.

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Biosimilar education campaign boost

FEDERAL Government funding to extend the Generic and Biosimilar Medicines Association's (GBMA's) biosimilar education program until at least Jun 2022, will be a boost for pharmacists, patients and prescribers, the organisation believes.

GBMA CEO, Marnie Peterson, said the extension of the Government grant highlighted the important role the awareness campaign has played in boosting confidence in the use of biosimilar brands of biological medicines that are listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

Peterson noted that since 2016, when GBMA launched its initial benchmark market research report, the level of community pharmacists reporting that they have experience with biosimilar medicines has increased by 77%, with 84% now reporting that they have confidence in counselling a patient on a biosimilar medicine.

The recently released *University of Technology Sydney 2020 Pharmacy Barometer Report*, noted that "the speed of uptake and adoption of biosimilars in Australia has been slower than originally expected".

The Barometer found that 36% of community pharmacists said they were confident when it came to substituting a biosimilar, up from 34% in 2019, while 57% rated their confidence level as "neutral".

However, the report noted a significant decline in those saying they were not confident about biosimilar substitution in 2020 (7% down from 15% in 2019).

Commenting on the finding, UTS Adjunct Professor and former Generic Medicines Industry Association Chair, John Montgomery, said confidence levels around biosimilar substitution were mirroring the early days of generics.

"A larger increase in confidence would have been expected given



the education programs in place," he said.

"It took time to build confidence in the early days of generics and biosimilars seem to be on a similar trajectory."

MEANWHILE, Arrotex Group General Manager - Marketing, Lisa Golden, reported it has taken a month for the company's PBS-listed adalimumab biosimilars, Hadlima and Amgevita, to surpass the etanercept biosimilar switch rate.

Golden said the savings generated by switching to biosimilars "allows the Federal Government to reinvest savings to list new medicines and health technologies on the PBS".

APP to host Deputy PM

DEPUTY Prime Minister, Michael McCormack, will join Health Minister, Greg Hunt, Shadow Health Minister, Mark Butler, and Queensland's Chief Health Officer, Jeannette Young, at the Australian Pharmacy Professional Conference (APP).

McCormack will address delegates during a session sponsored by Viatrix - the entity created following last year's merger of Mylan and Upjohn - on Thu 20 May, alongside Minister for Regional Health, Mark Coulton.

APP Convenor, Kos Scavos, thanked Viatrix for "accommodating this key presentation by the Deputy Prime Minister to be included in its allocated conference program time".

CLICK HERE to view the APP program.

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Dispensary Corner

POLITICIANS regularly get reminded of their flaws and failings, and never more frequently than during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Irish Health Minister, Stephen Donnelly, has copped plenty of criticism from disaffected social media users, who have spent months in lockdown as the Emerald Isle struggled to manage the virus.

So when a supportive letter came through from a recently immunised 83-year-old he just had to share it.

The unnamed octogenarian heralded Donnelly's efforts to rollout COVID-19 vaccines to the community, noting she had been able to catch up with friends for the first time in months, in late Apr.

"I'm happy to report that I enjoyed the visit and am relieved that I have not become a recluse despite staying home since 17 Dec last year," she said.

"I am deeply grateful to you, the Health Services Executive and our Government for taking such good care of us all during this pandemic.

"Don't mind the naysayers, I and many people I know think that in this precarious world you have all done a commendable job.

"Sure some mistakes were made and probably will be made, but it is evident that you are all working extremely hard and with the best of intentions."

Currently 30% of the adult population of Ireland have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

PSA issues pre Budget aged care plea

FEDERAL Treasurer, Josh Frydenberg, is being urged to increase funding to boost medicines safety in residential aged care facilities, in next week's 2021-22 Federal Budget.

Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) National President, Associate Professor Chris Freeman, reiterated calls for the Government to invest in pharmacist-led services in the aged care sector, in a pre-Budget plea released today.

"There is no denying that the current system is failing, and pharmacists are part of the solution," he said.

"The Government must act now, before it is too late for some of our aged care residents.

"Twenty per cent of unplanned hospital admissions for aged care residents are a result of inappropriate medicine use.

"This is a game of Russian roulette, and unfortunately our older Australians are paying the price.

"By embedding pharmacists in



these facilities, we can safeguard residents from the harms medicines are causing and maximise their effectiveness in improving quality of life."

Freeman said the PSA's *Medicine Safety: Take Care* report had found 98% of aged care residents had at least one medicine-related problem.

"This can no longer be tolerated," he said.

Freeman added that current service arrangements in Australia

and the limited funding available were "grossly inadequate" to support pharmacists to deliver the range of medication management services required to improve medicines safety in aged care.

Earlier this week the PSA President called on the Government to allocate \$200 million over the next four years to enable aged care facilities to engage pharmacists to tackle the inappropriate use of antipsychotic medicines and sedatives.

Pharmacy bandit gets eight years

GUN-WIELDING pharmacy bandit, Elioenai Aguinaga, is set to spend eight years behind bars after he admitted to holding-up a New Jersey pharmacy.

The 32-year-old, who brandished a semi-automatic handgun and demanded cash when he raided the Taylor's Pharmacy on Madison Avenue, Lakeside, New Jersey, on 26 Mar 2020, made off with a less than princely sum of US\$130.

A police investigation identified Aguinaga as the robber, and he was arrested on 25 Apr 2020, and remanded in Ocean County Jail, where he has been held since



he was apprehended, *NJ.com* reported.

Aguinaga was sentenced under the No Early Release Act and will have to serve almost seven years in prison before he can be considered eligible for parole.

NI pharmacists give 35k COVAX

COMMUNITY Pharmacies across Northern Ireland are proving their worth, administering more than 35,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines (COVAX) in the first two weeks of being involved in the campaign.

Community Pharmacy NI CEO, Gerard Greene, said the decision to bring pharmacies into the program had "vastly improved access to the vaccine" in the province.

He added that patients "really welcome the vaccine being available from pharmacies".



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