

Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news plus a full page from UTS.

MDR resignation

FORMER MedAdvisor (MDR) Chair, Peter Bennetto, will step down as a Director tomorrow, after eight years with the company.

Announcing Bennetto's resignation, current Chair, Chris Ridd, said "Peter was instrumental from the early days in helping to steer MDR's growth, and was also a key contributor to the Adheris acquisition last year".

"He leaves at a time when he can proudly look back on the achievements to date and with confidence about the future outlook," Ridd said.



Rego numbers rise despite shortages

DATA from the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency's (AHPRA's) annual report shows the number of registered pharmacists in Australia is continuing to grow.

The report revealed that 35,262 pharmacists were registered with the Pharmacy Board of Australia at the end of the 2020/21 reporting period - up 2.2% compared with 2019/20 - accounting for 4.3% of all registered health practitioners across the country.

More than a third of registered pharmacists (36.6%) are aged between 25 and 34 years, while 6.3% were aged 65 years or older.

Despite the increased number of pharmacists registered with the Board, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia has reported workforce shortages, and welcomed the Federal Government's decision to include pharmacy roles on the Skills Priority List for immigration (**PD** 23 Nov).

The report revealed that 405 notifications were lodged with AHPRA, 463 were referred to the Health Professional Councils Authority and 57 were made to the Office of the Health Ombudsman, with patients, a relative or member of the public the most common



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source of notifications (54.3%), while other practitioners accounted for 14.1%.

Almost three out of five complaints that were made against pharmacists related to medications, while 7.4% were associated with their communication, and 5.2% were regarding pharmacists' behaviour.

AHPRA recorded 16 criminal offence complaints about pharmacists, 11 were about title protection, two practice protection and three were about advertising breaches.

Of the 476 notifications relating to pharmacists that were closed in 2020/21, more than 70% required no further action, while 12.8% resulted in a pharmacist receiving a caution or reprimand.

Conditions were imposed on registration or an undertaking was accepted in 6.5% of cases, with 9.2% being referred to another body, or retained by a health complaints entity.

Of the cases that were referred to an adjudication body, 11 were decided by a tribunal, while one was decided by a panel.



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Mental health system needs revamp

PHARMACISTS should be supported to play a greater role in the provision of mental health services, Federal MP, Emma McBride, believes.

Discussing the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Select Committee's report, the pharmacist-turned-politician told the House of Representatives that "community pharmacists are often the first point of contact for many people experiencing mental health problems".

"As a pharmacist, I understand the valuable role of pharmacists and other allied health workers in mental health and suicide prevention," she said.

"Their role can span through to key members of multidisciplinary teams in acute inpatient settings.

"To support pharmacists in this role, the committee recommends evaluation of pharmacy mental health training and support for more mental health training for

pharmacists and pharmacy staff."

McBride noted that her experience working in the acute adult inpatient mental health unit at Wyong Hospital, had led to her decision to stand for election.

"I saw firsthand the circumstances of people's lives that led to sometimes lengthy inpatient stays in stretched and underfunded public adult mental health units, only to be discharged often to the circumstances that made them sick," she said.

"We discharged people to couches, to caravans, to caves.

"In a community where rents in the private rental market have increased by \$3,600 a year, this problem has become a crisis."

She added that workforce shortages were another factor that needed to be addressed to improve Australia's mental health services.

"There are simply not enough mental health workers, and there are barriers to employing existing



workers in the areas of greatest need, or to work to the top of their skills and training, the top of their scope of practice," McBride said.

"The National Mental Health Workforce Strategy must be finalised and acted on as a matter of urgency.

"Mental health is a bipartisan space, and it is above politics."

Arrotex extends Ferrogen range

ARROTEX Pharmaceuticals has launched a new therapeutic iron supplement, Ferrogen Iron + Folic Acid, to prevent and treat iron and folic acid deficiency anaemias.

The new product extends the company's Ferrogen iron supplement range, and contains ferrous sulfate 250mg and folic acid 300mg.

Ferrogen Iron + Folic Acid is available in packs of 30 modified release tablets.



VPA issues alert for fraudulent scripts

VICTORIAN pharmacists are being warned to monitor fentanyl prescriptions after a number of doctored scripts were successfully presented in pharmacies across the State.

In an alert issued by the Victorian Pharmacy Authority (VPA) earlier this month, pharmacy owners have been told to ensure employee pharmacists are aware that the fraudulent scripts have generally been for higher dose patches, usually Durogesic.

The VPA also noted that initial handwritten forgeries were first noted on stolen prescription pads from local and interstate



doctors, but computer-generated prescriptions have also been presented with phone numbers of the offenders or their associates, rather than a legitimate clinic, so pharmacists who try to check the validity of the scripts call an accomplice of the "patient", and are told they are legitimate.

Queenslander fined over COVID claims

CLAIMS that a homeopathic product could be used to treat and prevent COVID-19 have earned a Queenslander a \$2,664 fine from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

The medicines regulator had alleged that the individual advertised the use and supply of the product as a "homeopathic immunisation" that implied it could be used to protect against COVID-19.

"The advertising allegedly claimed the product is 'made from the actual COVID virus and will aid in the prevention and treatment of the COVID illness', the TGA said.

"References in advertising to the coronavirus (COVID-19) are a restricted representation and the individual had not been granted relevant authorisation to make the alleged claim.

"Some homeopathic and natural medicines are exempt from the requirement to be entered in the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods.

"However, advertisers of exempt products must comply with other requirements in the Act, including the rules on restricted representations in advertising, as well as compliance with the Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code."

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Owner's rego suspended

DEFICIENCIES in the record-keeping practices of pharmacists employed at a pharmacy business in relation to the dispensing and compounding of Schedule 4 and S8 drugs, have resulted in a pharmacy owner having his professional registration suspended for six months.

Kingswood Compounding Pharmacy owner, Samer Ashour, conceded that he had failed to fully comply with his obligations over a two-year period to Jul 2017.

A NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal heard that the pharmacy had been subject to an investigation by the Pharmaceutical Regulatory Unit (PRU) in 2017.

The investigation found that the pharmacy had been purchasing large quantities of somatropin and testosterone, and "pharmacists employed by the pharmacy had inappropriately dispensed and compounded several drugs".

The Pharmacy Council of NSW subsequently criticised Ashour for his oversight and management of the store, and imposed a number of conditions on his registration, including barring him from dispensing or compounding several medicines.

Disqualified for stalking

MELBOURNE-BASED pharmacist, Alexander Ho, will be unable to renew his registration with the Pharmacy Board of Australia for at least 12 months, after being found to have engaged in professional misconduct.

The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal heard that Ho has been found guilty without conviction of stalking a man he met through an online dating app in Apr 2019, and he was sentenced to a 12-month community corrections order and fined \$1,500.

The Tribunal was told that Ho and his victim had communicated using the app for a short period in 2013, but never met in-person, after which the other man asked him to stop contacting him.

However, Ho persisted in messaging the man from 2013 to 2017, despite multiple attempts to block him and requests to cease contact.

In 2017, when the victim continued to block or ignore Ho, his conduct escalated and broadened to include communicating with others in the health system seeking to discredit the victim, and with the victim's family.

Tribunal papers noted that between late 2017 and early 2018, Ho began discrediting his victim, who is a registered medical professional, in employment, social and family circles.

The Tribunal heard that Ho



"contacted a number of heads of department at the hospital where the victim worked and made allegations about the victim, including allegations of paedophilia, medical practitioner misconduct and inappropriate online sexual behaviour", which led to the man being subjected to a number of workplace investigations.

Ho had initially contested the Pharmacy Board of Australia's call for his registration to be cancelled and that he should be disqualified for 12 months, as it would jeopardise his continued employment at Monash Health.

However, at a Tribunal hearing on 28 Oct, Ho's legal counsel said he no longer opposed the cancellation, as he no longer worked as a pharmacist.

The Tribunal was told Ho "had chosen for 'spiritual reasons' not to be vaccinated and so could no longer work in healthcare", and he did not intend to renew his registration.



Dispensary Corner

COVID-19 has broken out among attendees at a recent "health summit" in Florida where anti-vaccine doctors discussed a range of alternative treatments for the disease.

Sufferers are believed to include 71-year-old Dr Bruce Boros, who told delegates "I have been on ivermectin for 16 months... I have never felt healthier in my life".

Two days later he contracted COVID-19, along with at least six other attendees at the event which took place on 06 Nov.

Organiser John Littell vehemently denied that the conference was a "super-spreader," telling the *Daily Beast* "I think they had gotten it from New York or Michigan or wherever they were from".

The *Guardian* cited sources close to Boros saying he was "gravely ill" at his Key West home, although Littell insisted the anti-vax cardiologist was responding well to treatment with ivermectin.

The conference took place at the World Equestrian Center in Ocala - which some have noted was quite an appropriate venue for the gathering given that ivermectin is an antiparasitic commonly used to treat horses.

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