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PBS co-payment must halve: Twomey

MEDICINES affordability will be a key issue in the next Federal election campaign, with Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, calling for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme general co-payment to be slashed.

Addressing pharmacy owners during a Guild webinar on Wed, Twomey said the \$41.30 co-payment was "ridiculous for a chronic disease medicine, it is far too expensive" for many Australians.

"We do not have universal healthcare if every element of Australia's primary healthcare system is not truly accessible to all Australians," he said.

Twomey noted that one-in-five people in marginal electorates, and 12.5% of people across the country, were not getting their medicines dispensed regularly, because they were not affordable.

"Compliance and accessibility are only one part of the quality use of medicines in Australia," he said.

"If people simply can't afford to



get the basics what's the use of having big shiny tertiary hospitals with bells and whistles when people are being hospitalised simply for chronic diseases that could have been easily and cheaply prevented.

"We are working hand-in-glove with the Government, but I have to tell you we are getting a much better response from the opposition on reducing the general co-payment.

"That \$41 co-payment needs to halve, and halve soon.

"It is out of reach for an essential service for most working

Australians, and if you're on two or three medicines it's completely unaffordable.

"The amount of money that we have wasted over the course of this [COVID-19] pandemic, because we could've done things more effectively, would've been far more efficiently spent if it was invested in restoring the principles of universal access to the PBS.

"That is exactly what your Guild will be taking to the next election, not just on your behalf, but on behalf of all your patients as well."

Today's issue of *PD*
Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news.

Migraine drug gets PI update

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is advising health professionals of an update to the product information (PI) for migraine treatment, erenumab.

The updated PI includes a warning statement about a potential causal relationship between the medication and hypertension.

"If you are treating a patient with erenumab, you should monitor them for new-onset hypertension or worsening of pre-existing hypertension," the TGA said.

The TGA recommended discontinuing treatment if hypertension develops with no alternative cause identified.



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Mandatory vax essential: CHA

CATHOLIC Health Australia (CHA) is calling on the Federal Government to mandate the vaccination of disability support workers against COVID-19.

CHA Director of Mission Strategy, Rebecca Burdick Davies, said the opt-in model was not working, and similar measures were needed to those implemented for the aged care sector.

"We have a duty of care to protect the most vulnerable in our community, and we can start by requiring our staff to be vaccinated," she said.

Burdick Davies added that with more doses arriving there were no excuses for staff not to be immunised.

Pharmacy workforce set for boost

HIGHER than anticipated numbers of overseas trained pharmacists sitting the Australian Pharmacy Council's (APC's) Knowledge Assessment of Pharmaceutical Sciences (KAPS) exam, could ease workforce shortages, Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, believes.

Speaking during the Guild's fortnightly COVID-19 update earlier this week, Twomey said the Federal Government's decision to add pharmacies to the Priority Migration Skilled Occupations List (PD 13 Jul) had led to a significant increase in the number of candidates applying to sit the exams.

"Because your Guild was able to lobby the Government to have pharmacists as essential workers put on the Priority Migration Skilled Occupations List - and we only had that win in the last couple of months - within the last eight weeks there has been a 75% increase in the number of people that have applied

to do the KAPS exam," he said.

"[Around] 65% of that increased amount are already sitting here in Australia - they don't need to get on a boat or a plane and come in through a hard border and quarantine for two weeks, they're already here.

"They're fully qualified pharmacists and registered in other comparable countries, there was just a blockage to getting a visa to be able to work.

"This will add an extra 120 registered pharmacists, which I know is not huge, but to be honest with you, it's like adding another whole university cohort of graduates.

"Imagine adding another University of Sydney to the mix, or another Monash University or University of Queensland, one of those big schools, that's exactly what this does."

Twomey also noted "the great work" that the APC and the Australian Health Practitioner



Regulation Agency (AHPRA) have been doing in maintaining the pandemic sub-register of pharmacists.

"There's 1,755 pharmacists that had recently let their registration lapse that are now back on," he said.

"They are completely registered for the purposes of assisting with the COVID-19 vaccination rollout.

"So there are 1,755 people out there that chose to have their registration reactivated, because they wanted to help vaccinate, so get the word out.

"If you are looking for somebody, not to dispense, but to assist you with this extra service [these pharmacists are registered]."

COVAX benefits 'far outweigh' risks: TGA

ADVERSE event reports associated with COVID-19 vaccines (COVAX) are continuing to decline, with the latest Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) safety report showing the reporting rate had fallen to 2.7 per 1,000 doses.

The weekly update released yesterday revealed that as of 05 Sep 20, 985,989 doses had been administered in Australia, with a total of 57,161 adverse events following immunisation reported.

"The most common adverse effects reported to the TGA following immunisation are predictable and have been observed with many vaccines," the TGA report said.

"They include headache, muscle pain, fever, chills and injection site reactions for both vaccines.

"Large scale vaccination means that coincidentally some people

will experience a new illness or die within a few days or weeks of vaccination."

The TGA noted that it is continually monitoring COVAX, particularly "rare reports of blood clots with low blood platelets, which have been found to be linked to the Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca) vaccine".

"Early detection of this syndrome may help to prevent more serious complications developing and guidance for health professionals is now available," the TGA said.

In the last week, an additional seven reports of blood clots and low blood platelets have been assessed as confirmed or probable thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS).

"None of these cases was fatal."

"The protective benefits of vaccination against COVID-19 far outweigh the potential risks of vaccination."



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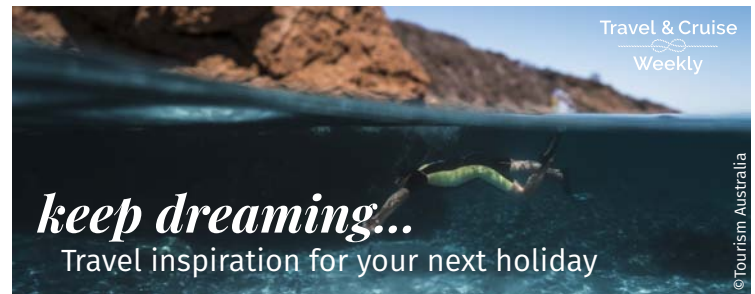
find out how we can help

FIP makes air pollution plea

NATIONAL health authorities around the globe need to empower pharmacists to play a greater role in managing respiratory conditions to combat the effects of air pollution the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) believes.

With air pollution identified as one of the top 10 threats to global health, FIP CEO, Catherine Duggan, urged governments to implement pharmacy-based services to identify and reduce risk factors by providing education on inhaler technique, and nasal hygiene.

She said pharmacists were "uniquely positioned to triage patients with respiratory symptoms and diseases", adding the profession has "the potential to make a huge impact on health outcomes".



Qld shows Moderna leadership: PSA

MOVES by Queensland Health to authorise pharmacists to administer the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to patients aged 12 years and older in line with the vaccination's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approval, are being welcomed by the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA).

With 1,200 pharmacies across the country set to receive supplies of the vaccine by the end of next week (**PD** 09 Sep), PSA Queensland Branch President, Shane McDonald, backed the State Government's decision.

"Queensland needs the entire immunisation workforce to come together in order to meet COVID-19 vaccination targets, and this new advice from Queensland Health allows pharmacists to play an even greater role in the vaccination strategy," he said.

"The Palaszczuk Government was the first to allow pharmacists to administer COVID-19 vaccines. "It is great that Queensland is



again showing leadership, with pharmacists able to administer any TGA-approved COVID-19 vaccine, in all locations vaccines are provided, to all TGA-approved ages during the pandemic to support the COVID-19 vaccination strategy.

"PSA Queensland has a proud history of working productively with the Queensland Government and will continue to work closely with Queensland Health to maximise the utilisation of pharmacists."

A total of one million doses of the

vaccine, which will be administered exclusively through community pharmacies, are due to arrive in Australia this month with a further three million to be imported each month until the end of the year.

Speaking during a COVID-19 update on Wed, Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, noted the Moderna vaccine was to be initially preferred for administration to patients aged between 12 and 59 years old.

Dispensary Corner

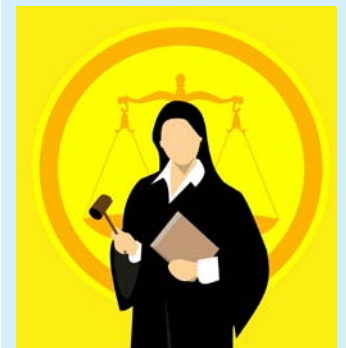
MINT Hill Pharmacy in North Carolina is facing scrutiny from the State's professional regulator, after a post promoting Ivermectin for the treatment of COVID-19 was spotted on its Facebook page.

The post which said, "many people have been calling us about our availability of Ivermectin for COVID - we wanted to let everyone know that we were able to obtain a large supply in case it is needed".

The pharmacy removed the post shortly after a reporter from broadcaster *Fox 46*, Robin Kanady, questioned dispensary staff about it, noting that Ivermectin was not approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment or prevention of COVID-19.

"This could be misleading people who don't know that it's not approved by the FDA," Kanady said.

"You put it out there on Facebook, the pharmacy did, what do you say to people who say this might be misleading?" the reporter asked as the staff member refused to respond.



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Check in on your pharmacist: PSA

FOLLOWING R U OK? Day yesterday, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) is encouraging patients to be mindful of the stresses and strains pharmacies are facing.

PSA National President, Associate Professor Chris Freeman, noted that low wages, extended working hours, regulatory changes, managing medicines shortages and increasing incidences of verbal and physical abuse were contributing to burnout within the profession.