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Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features two pages of news.

Meds shortages

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has updated the database of section 19A approvals to import and supply medicines to address product shortages.

The regulator has given the green-light for Ranbaxy UK's sertraline 50 and 100mg film-coated tablets to be supplied until 30 Jun, as a result of shortages across a range of Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods listed brands.

Shortages of Actemra tocilizumab injection preparations has seen specific Roche Germany RoActemra tocilizumab infusion products get s19A approval until 28 Feb. [CLICK HERE](#) for more.

Free market creates RAT inequities

STEPS need to be taken to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RATs) for patients living in rural communities, Victorian pharmacy owner, Emad Sidhom, believes.

With the rollout of the Federal Government's Concessional RAT program underway, Sidhom, the proprietor of Wedderburn Pharmacy told *Pharmacy Daily*, that small rural and remote pharmacies' ability to obtain supplies of RATs was being hampered by the program's reliance on free market forces to access supplies.

"It's now a free market thing - who has the money in a very simple way will get more earlier than others," he said.

"[For] small rural pharmacies like us it's very hard to do that... we don't have the same available cash like big pharmacy groups and we will see places like here where people cannot have access to

something like these tests because of the current way it is supplied.

"The free market is fine if you're talking about an aftershave... but in the current situation this is probably one of the most - if not the most - important products for health, because according to it people can work, they can study, they can leave home and they can make their loved ones sick."

Sidhom said many rural communities have limited access to PCR testing, making RATs an even more vital tool in managing COVID-19 outbreaks.

"What we're hoping for is some kind of intervention, it shouldn't be left to the market," he said.

"It shouldn't be who can pay will get it first, it should be that those who need it will have it, the same way as with other products.

"One of the things that Government can do - whether it's Federal or State - is act as a guarantor so wholesalers can get



quantities without worrying about whether pharmacies are not going to pay, because at the end of the day they will be sold.

"They should be subject to all the restrictions of Community Service Obligation (CSO) Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) supplies, so pharmacies can get quantities not according to willingness to pay upfront, but according to the need of their communities."

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Dispensary Corner

FOR several years business experts have been urging pharmacists not to shy away from introducing fees for services they provide.

It would appear that after two years of COVID-19-related stresses and strains some pharmacy owners are placing a dollar-value on the time being consumed by customers who ignore signs stating that their stores do not have rapid antigen tests available.

One pharmacy has posted a sign on the door saying "we do not have any RATs, please note a \$5 fee applies if you still ask".



Guild IT issues resolved

TECHNICAL difficulties experienced by consumers attempting to use the Pharmacy Guild of Australia's findapharmacy.com.au site to identify local stores participating in the free concession cardholder COVID-19 rapid antigen test program have been resolved, a spokesperson says.

Responding to reports that the website crashed or failed to load throughout the first day of the Federal Government's scheme, the spokesperson told *Pharmacy Daily* that there had been some "minor difficulties" with the site.

"The demand yesterday was unprecedented, and while the system held up, there were a few understandable glitches given the load and timeframe of the launch," the spokesperson said.

"In the main the majority of customers who used the site found it useful in sourcing RATs.

"Our focus is on ensuring patients are able to access this information and therefore we will continue to monitor the site and have already scheduled upgrades based on yesterday's experience for later in the week".

Speaking during an update webinar last week, Guild National

President, Trent Twomey, had highlighted the importance of the site, and noted that the organisation had invested in boosting capacity ahead of the RAT program.

"We will be adding extra functionality to this website so it is not just the single source of truth for accessing COVID-19 vaccinations, but it will also be the single source of truth nationally that everyone can use for access to the concessional RAT program," he said.

"We have thrown a lot of resources at this website to ensure that load is there, so it can handle the increased volumes [of users]."

While the site will initially allow pharmacies to list that they are participating in the scheme and enable them to adjust settings twice daily to indicate that they have stock, Twomey said the Guild was also planning to extend its functionality so that stores can indicate that they have RATs available for private sale, at a later date.

Twomey added that the site was an important tool for pharmacies to use to let consumers know about the availability of RATs.

Guild Update

Rapid Antigen Tests

GLOBAL supply issues continue to pose big challenges for community pharmacies working to meet demand for rapid antigen tests.

Supplies are expected to improve by early to mid Feb.

Right now, many pharmacies are unable to meet all demand for private sales or to take part immediately in the new government scheme to provide free tests to 6.6 million Australian pension and concession holders.

The Pharmacy Guild says some pharmacists have been notified at the very last minute that their order has been cancelled and not replaced with another delivery – requiring them to place a new order, often with another supplier.

Concession holders will receive up to 10 tests over three months, with a maximum five per month.

The three 'months' are likely to be: 24 Jan to 28 Feb 2022; 1 to 31 Mar 2022; and 1 to 30 Apr 2022.



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Vic Police thwart attempted RAT raid

VICTORIAN Police have arrested two men who allegedly attempted to steal a supply of COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RATs) from a test centre in Melbourne on Sun.

The duo were apprehended before they could flee the Moonee Ponds testing site with a stash of the coveted home-test kits the *Herald Sun* reported.

Police have confirmed that all

1,400 RATs grabbed in the raid have been recovered.

A 19-year-old has been charged in relation to the attempted theft, and has been granted bail to appear before Broadmeadows Magistrates Court on 13 Jul.

Police have yet to press charges against a 23-year-old, who has been released pending further investigations into the incident.