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Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features three pages of news.

PBS push for weight loss drugs

AMERICAN pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly is pushing for its weight-loss drug, Mounjaro, to be subsidised by Australia's Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for people with severe obesity.

The injectable drug, which is a competitor to Ozempic, has already been made available on Britain's public health care system to some patients, while the US Government is also considering subsidising some drugs for obesity treatment.

If Eli Lilly's proposal is successful in Australia, the subsidy would apply only for a defined group of obese people with related health risks rather than general weight loss, and could set a precedent for other weight loss drugs to be listed on the PBS.

Tori Brown, Eli Lilly's GM for AU/NZ, confirmed the company will soon lodge a funding submission in Canberra.

"Eli Lilly acknowledges the challenge ahead in the Australian environment," Brown said.

"There are no contemporary anti-obesity medications funded by the Australian Government despite multiple unsuccessful applications by another manufacturer.

"However, there is increased understanding within the Federal Government of the benefits offered by medicines such as Mounjaro," she added.

Aussie start-up nabs Sigma as client

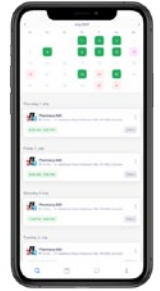
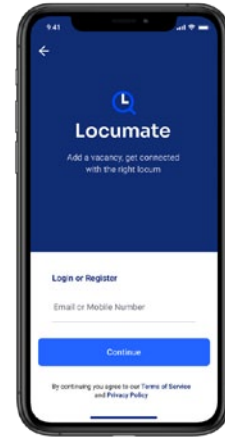
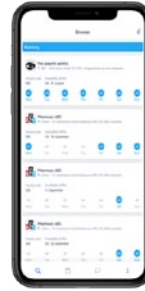
SIGMA is the latest pharmacy group to join Locumate.ai, a Melbourne start-up specialising in pharmacy talent automation.

The agreement arrives at a pivotal time as Sigma, the parent company of Amcal and Discount Drug Stores, prepares to merge with Chemist Warehouse in a deal worth \$25 billion (PD 08 Nov 2024).

"What impressed us about Locumate's software was that it was an aggregator of the workforce within pharmacy, providing our members the agility they need to manage their on-demand workforce requirements," said Renee Watson, Sigma's Head of Retail Operations.

The major sign-on sees Locumate gain access to more than 400 pharmacists, with the on-demand workforce platform now enjoying exposure to the majority of pharmacies in Australia, having already signed on Douglas Chemist Group, Prime Pharmacy and Allied Health Locums as clients.

According to Locumate founders Kavita Nadan and Surge Singh, the AI-powered platform has filled



thousands of locum shifts since its launch in 2021, saving pharmacists around \$2.5 million in locum agency fees.

"During the COVID pandemic we identified a huge gap in the on-demand workforce in the pharmacy industry and after creating Locumate.ai with Surge to solve that problem we realised the potential for our solution to operate in all types of business verticals," Nadan said.

"With Locumate.ai, organisations have more control over their on-

demand staffing needs on a daily basis and it is fast, efficient and enables more opportunities for mutually meaningful and long-lasting connections."

The start-up expanded into the US last year, teaming up with the Californian and American Pharmacist Associations to launch a new joint venture called HealthShifts (PD 23 Apr 2024).

Locumate.ai was also recently recognised on *The Australian's* Top 100 Innovators list for 2024, and (PD 22 Oct 2024). JM

Big pharma turns blind eye to AMR

THERE is currently no incentive for pharmaceutical companies to develop new antibiotics, England's former Chief Medical Officer, Sally Davies, has emphasised, amid warnings that the global death rate from antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is expected to double to 40 million by 2050 (PD 19 Sep 2024).

The ease with which AMR spreads means it is imperative that new antibiotics be developed as a matter of urgency, Davies argued.

"We've had no new classes of antibiotics come into routine use since the late '80s and the market model that would promote the creation of new ones is broken," she told the *Observer*.

"If you develop a new antibiotic, it might be used by someone for a weekly course once a year - where's the profit in that?"

She stressed that the rise of AMR means that routine procedures like childbirth could carry life-threatening risks within the next 25 years.

Parkinson's relief

KETAMINE could benefit patients with Parkinson's disease, potentially helping the motor cortex to regain some control over movement, new research from the University of Arizona has uncovered.

The common anaesthetic could help disrupt abnormal repetitive electrical patterns in the brain that occur during dyskinesia, involuntary movements that develop after years of treatment with levodopa - see the study [HERE](#).

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Pfizer drug linked to tumours

PFIZER could face legal action in Australia after its popular contraceptive, Depo-Provera, was linked to brain tumours.

Australian law firm Shine Lawyers said it is currently looking into whether legal action against the pharmaceutical giant is viable, in response to findings from a major study published in the *British Medical Journal* last year.

The study found that women who had used Depo-Provera, which is a high-dose injection of a synthetic progesterone called medroxyprogesterone acetate, for more than a year had a five-to-six-fold increased risk of developing a meningioma compared to women who didn't use it.

While meningiomas are not malignant, the slow-growing tumours require removal, as they could cause problems once they reach a certain size, particularly if they are close to important nerves.

Study author epidemiologist Dr Noemie Roland said, "we are

very worried about this issue... we fear a significant prevalence of meningioma, where women are highly exposed to Depo-Provera".

"We think that the cumulative dose of progestones is a major issue, and when you have long exposure," she said.

According to PBS figures, an estimated 24,000 women are currently using Depo-Provera in Australia, while around 74 million women use Depo-Provera globally.

Lorne Franks from Shine Lawyers said that until Feb of last year, "there was no disclosure or a warning whatsoever in any of the material that's provided to consumers or their doctors".

"There's been studies going back at least to the early 2000s which is at least suggestive of the link [to meningioma]," he added.

Franks revealed that a number of women who had developed meningiomas early in life and had used Depo-Provera long term had already contacted the law firm. *JM*

Raven puts rural pharmacy in the spotlight

THE latest episode of Raven Recruitment's Your Pharmacy Career Podcast explores the unique opportunities and challenges of rural pharmacy.

Released in Dec, the episode features an in-depth discussion with Shaylee Mills (pictured), who is described as a "trailblazer" in rural pharmacy and Aboriginal health services.

Mills shares her personal journey, from growing up in a small wheatbelt town in Western Australia to becoming the creator of The Rural Pharmacist, a social media platform that empowers pharmacists to explore the rural health workforce.

In the podcast episode, she also offers valuable insights about overcoming internship burnout and finding balance in a demanding profession; the importance of building resilience and fostering authentic connections; and how to inspire the next generation of healthcare



professionals, including high school students considering a pharmacy career.

Reflecting on the importance of maintaining optimism and community in challenging environment, Mills said that "negativity can be quite loud".

"Make sure you find the places or people that give you positivity, because those are the areas that will make a world of difference."

This episode is available now on all major podcast platforms - listen to it [HERE](#).

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Dispensary Corner

IT'S not often that you get prescribed social media time for your health, but experts believe that watching short clips on TikTok and Instagram could help people achieve their Dry January goals.

Around 200,000 people are expected to participate in the alcohol-free movement, which aims to improve health, however polls show that the average person will only make it until 11 Jan.

For those who are struggling to lay off the beer and the bubbles, you might be happy to know that distracting your brain with interesting or entertaining online content can reduce the urge to drink.

The psychological hack is backed by Georgia Foster, a Melbourne-based therapist who runs The Drink Less Mind program, and says the key to sticking with Dry January is "tricking your brain into thinking other thoughts".

She recommends watching a funny video on social media, or calling a friend, whenever a thought arises about craving an alcoholic drink.

"In that nanosecond it will shift you away from that instant go-to thought to have a drink," she explained.

If you're not much of a social media user, physical activity can also serve as an effective distraction - as can other dopamine-boosting activities, such as listening to music, exploring the great outdoors, and meditating.

One cig costs you 20 min



CIGARETTE smokers are being urged to heed new research out of the UK, which shows that every cigarette smoked, on average, can take around 20 minutes off their life expectancy.

Researchers at University College London estimated the loss of life expectancy per cigarette is approximately 17 minutes for men and 22 for women, after taking into account socioeconomic status and other factors.

The study, which was published last week in the journal *Addiction*, found that on average, people who smoked throughout their lives shaved around a decade off their lifespan compared with people who never smoked.

"Twenty cigarettes at twenty minutes per cigarette works out to be almost seven hours of life lost per pack," said Dr. Sarah Jackson, lead author of the paper and a principal research fellow in the UCL Alcohol and Tobacco Research Group.

"The time they're losing is time that they could be spending with their loved ones in fairly good health," she pointed out.

"With smoking, it doesn't eat into the later period of your life that tends to be lived in poorer health.

"Rather, it seems to erode some relatively healthier section in the middle of life.

"So when we're talking about loss of life expectancy, life expectancy would tend to be lived in relatively good health," Jackson added.

The new data from the UK suggests that the harm caused by smoking appears to be cumulative, and the amount of life expectancy that can be recovered by quitting may depend on several factors, such as age and how long someone has smoked.

People who quit in their twenties or early thirties tend to have a similar life expectancy to people who have never smoked, according to Jackson, who added, "but no matter how old you are when you quit, you will always have a longer life expectancy than if you had continued to smoke".

In their research paper, Jackson and her colleagues wrote that a person smoking 10 cigarettes per day who quits smoking on 01 Jan could prevent the loss of a full day of life by 08 Jan, a full week of life by 20 Feb, and a full month by 05 Aug, and by the end of the year, would have avoided losing 50 days of life expectancy. *JM*

Should AI be able to select embryos?

RESEARCHERS at Monash University have flagged concerns surrounding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in fertility treatment.

In an article published by the *European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology*, researchers highlighted several ethical worries when it comes to using machine learning tools to improve the selection of human embryos for transfer.

While the AI tools can help increase the chances of a successful pregnancy and reduce the time and cost of treatments, it carries the risk of dehumanising patients, algorithmic bias, transparency and equitable access.

"The use of AI in embryo selection means that computer algorithms are beginning to make decisions about who is brought into the world," lead author Dr. Julian Koplin said.

"There are some important benefits to this technology - but it does involve AI interfering with a particularly sensitive area of human life, which needs to be handled carefully and respectfully."

Co-author Dr. Johnston said several assisted reproductive clinics in Australia have recently begun rolling out AI in clinical practice, with many others expected to follow suit in the near future.

The researchers emphasised the need for careful decisions about how accountability for clinical outcomes will be managed, how the tools will be monitored, and how patients will be informed about (and can opt out of) their use.