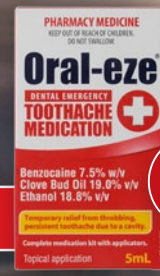


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Health ministry shake-up in WA

THE Pharmacy Guild of Australia WA Branch President Andrew Ngeow has welcomed the incoming Minister for Health and Mental Health, Meredith Hammat, and Sabine Winton, who has stepped into the newly established role of Minister for Preventative Health.

He also thanked the outgoing Minister for Health, Amber-Jade Sanderson, for her strong commitment to reforming the state's primary healthcare system.

"Minister Sanderson was appointed to the portfolio at a time when Western Australia was under a COVID-induced state of emergency," Ngeow said.

"Despite stepping into the portfolio during this challenging time, she spearheaded reforms which have delivered Western Australians with more accessible, more convenient and more cost-effective healthcare options."

The launch of a free influenza vaccine campaign and expansion of the broader Community Pharmacy

Immunisation Program, which now totals 16 vaccines to a patient group starting at five years and older, are among her achievements.

She also worked with the WA Guild to introduce pharmacist treatment of urinary tract infections and pharmacist resupply of oral contraceptive pills.

By 2027, appropriately trained and authorised pharmacists will be able to provide diagnosis and prescribing for a broad range of acute and chronic conditions.

"The availability of immediate primary healthcare through community pharmacy has never been greater, and we thank the Minister for her commitment to patients," Ngeow said.

MEANWHILE, the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), the country's peak body for public health, has enthusiastically welcomed the establishment of a Minister of Preventative Health as a national first, saying it sends a signal to other jurisdictions that



they too can prioritise preventative health at the highest level.

The Labor Government had previously committed to allocating 5% of the state's health budget to preventative health efforts.

"We're pleased that Premier Roger Cook in his unveiling of his Ministry has linked preventative health's capacity to reduce demand in our hospitals over the long term," added PHAA WA Branch President, Ainslie Sartori. *KB*

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Warning on bottle feeding

PARENTS and carers should avoid using a bottle to put toddlers to sleep, experts have warned, after new research linked the practice to dental cavities and overweight in early childhood.

Using data from over 700 toddlers, researchers analysed survey results from mothers, child dental checks and body measurements, as well as other factors that could affect dental hygiene and weight.

They found that more than 30% of children were still bottle fed to sleep at two years old, and were twice as likely to be overweight, while those still bottle fed at three years old had almost twice as many teeth affected by tooth decay.

Parents are advised to introduce cups at six months of age, stop using baby bottles at 12 months, and not to bottle feed to sleep at any age.

“Turbocharge” healthcare: RIPAA

THE Remote and Isolated Pharmacist Association Australia (RIPAA) is urging the Federal Government to “try something different” in rural Australia and fund an innovative pharmacy model that will “turbocharge primary healthcare in areas that need it the most”.

The organisation is calling on the government ahead of next week’s budget to fund a pilot to support community pharmacies in “thin rural markets” to deliver expanded services.

“The funding will assist pharmacies to attract, recruit and retain the necessary workforce to deliver an expanded services model and enable pharmacy to move beyond dispensing and provide a much broader range of face-to-face services in disadvantaged communities - both within the pharmacy and across other local settings such as the patient’s home and Aged Care,” said a spokesperson for RIPAA.

While pharmacists play an important role in the healthcare system, one that is gradually expanding to encompass a more formalised role in primary care and prescribing, RIPAA pointed out that pharmacy remuneration largely revolves around dispensing and prescription volume, with limited government funding for non-dispensing services.

“Pharmacy service viability is a particular challenge in small towns across rural and remote Australia where the pharmacist workforce is in short supply, employment costs are higher than metropolitan areas, and many patients are unable to afford the out-of-pocket expenses of user-pays services,” said RIPAA.

“This triple whammy is creating a situation where pharmacies within communities with the worst access to care, where GPs and other healthcare professionals are also stretched, are having a hard time making expanded pharmacy services sustainable.”

While there are a number of pharmacist prescribing pilots currently underway in various Australian jurisdictions, RIPAA noted these trials have not been designed in such a way to enable smaller rural pharmacies to participate.

By way of example, there are very few remote and isolated (MM5-7) pharmacies taking part in the Queensland full scope pilot, with workforce constraints and funding barriers preventing the pharmacies that are best positioned to do more for their communities from being involved.

RIPAA noted that the proposed model will complement and integrate with existing local healthcare providers and support more equitable health outcomes for rural patients that rely heavily on their local community pharmacy. *KB*



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TWC joins cheaper meds push

TERRYWHITE Chemmart has announced it is engaging its network of more than 600 pharmacies to support the push for more affordable medicines, highlighting the impact on the health system.

Last week saw leading health and community voices, including pharmacy peak bodies the Guild, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia and Advanced Pharmacy Australia, as well as the Australian Patients Association, calling for bipartisan support to reduce the maximum out-of-pocket cost of prescription medicine from \$31.60 to \$19 (**PD** 13 Mar).

TWC Executive General Manager Nick Munroe commended the government on its efforts to date in making medicines more affordable. "Last year, the government reduced the co-payment for general patients, a cost-of-living measure that was incredibly well received by patients," Munroe said. "However, more can be done as

financial pressures continue to be faced by many."

As frontline healthcare providers, pharmacists support millions of Australians in managing chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and asthma, and see firsthand how rising costs force people to choose between their essential medications and everyday necessities like food and rent.

TWC pointed out that when patients are unable to afford their medications, their health deteriorates, leading to increased hospital admissions and greater strain on the healthcare system.

"To deliver better health outcomes for the communities we serve, medicines need to be affordable," Munroe said.

"No-one should have to choose between filling a prescription and putting food on the table, and that's why we are supporting this campaign to further ease the cost burden on Australian families." *KB*

New dementia care training framework

DEMENTIA Training Australia (DTA) has introduced Australia's first free National Dementia Education and Training Standards Framework for health professionals and other carers, aimed at improving outcomes for people living with dementia.

Developed in response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care, the framework ensures that aged care services, healthcare workers and first responders have access to high quality, consistent training, no matter their location, economic position or stage of career.

The framework also covers the dementia training needs of the wider community, including family members caring for a person living with dementia.

The framework has been introduced ahead of the new *Aged Care Act*, which takes effect on 01 Jul, where aged care workers found negligent in their duties may face significant fines

and penalties.

With an expectation of improved care, now more than ever, those working with patients living with dementia must urgently assess their training levels and upskill where needed, DTA encouraged.

"The Standards Framework articulates in clear detail the reason why training is critically important for the delivery of quality care and support," said Dr Isabelle Meyer, Executive Director of DTA.

"Quality and consistency are key when it comes to training staff who care for people living with dementia.

"The Standards Framework not only sets clear expectations but also serves as a vital tool for recruiting the right people, maintaining high standards, and delivering quality dementia education and training," Dr Meyer said.

Visit the DTA website **HERE**.

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Dive into our latest podcast episode featuring **Susan Nguyen**, a Community pharmacist, co-owner of Carmen Drive Community Pharmacy, and founder of ADHD Support Pharmacist.

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Few effective back pain options

JUST one in 10 common non-surgical and non-invasive treatments for back pain are effective, and pain relief is only marginally better than placebo, according to Australian research published today.

A total of 301 trials investigating 56 different treatments or treatment combinations for non-specific low back pain were included in a pooled data analysis conducted by researchers from Neuroscience Research Australia, the University of New South Wales and the University of Sydney.

The trials were carried out in a total of 44 countries in Africa, North America, South America, Asia, Australia and Europe.

The approaches included were pharmacological, such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and muscle relaxants, and non-pharmacological, such as exercise, massage and spinal manipulation.

The pooled data analysis showed that compared with placebo, no non-pharmacological treatments and only NSAIDs emerged as effective for acute low back pain.

Treatments that were not effective included exercise, steroid injections and paracetamol.

For chronic low back pain, exercise, spinal manipulation, taping, antidepressants and drugs that target pain receptors (TRPV1 agonists) were effective, but the effects were small.

Anaesthetics (i.e. Lidocaine) and antibiotics were not effective.

Evidence was inconclusive for a wide range of commonly used



treatments, including acupuncture, massage, osteopathy, TENS and complementary medicines.

Low back pain is common and debilitating, and 80%-90% of it is categorised as non-specific, because there is no immediately identifiable cause.

Non-surgical and non-invasive approaches are recommended as the initial treatment approach.

But many such options are available, said the researchers, and it is not always easy to know which ones are effective.

Many of the available trials included in the analysis had only a few participants and reported inconsistent results, while the type and quality of some of the placebos used varied considerably, potentially affecting the certainty of the findings, they pointed out.

“Our review did not find reliable evidence of large effects for any of the included treatments, which is consistent with clinical guidelines and our previous review,” the researchers said.

“While we would like to provide more certain recommendations for where to invest and disinvest in treatments, it is not possible at this time,” they concluded.

Read the paper [HERE](#). KB

Passion for more accessible healthcare

SUSAN Nguyen, a community pharmacist, co-owner of Carmen Drive Community Pharmacy and founder of ADHD Support Pharmacist once considered a very different career before landing on pharmacy.

After initially contemplating a career in business and accounting, she discovered her passion for healthcare and a commitment to making healthcare more accessible, particularly in travel health and ADHD support.

Nguyen shares the story of her journey with Krysti-Lee Patterson in the latest *Your Pharmacy Career Podcast*, including the story behind Travel Healthy, an innovative pharmacy-led travel health consultation service she co-founded to address the growing need for structured travel health advice.

Additionally, she delves into the challenges of ADHD care in pharmacy, emphasising the need

for better support systems for patients and families navigating medication and treatment options.

With lived experience of ADHD, she also shares insights into creating inclusive work environments, particularly for neurodivergent pharmacy staff, ensuring that strengths are maximised and teams can thrive.

Nguyen is a strong advocate for collaboration in healthcare, and she discusses the importance of pharmacists working closely with other health professionals to improve patient outcomes.

Listen to the podcast [HERE](#).



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Dispensary Corner

A MUSICIAN has discovered a novel way to manage some of the symptoms of Parkinson's disease, and turned it into an international movement.

PingPongParkinson is the brainchild of Nenad Bach, who had to stop playing the guitar when his symptoms became too severe.

When he discovered that playing ping pong helped with the guitar, he reasoned that if it helps him, it may help others.

The game improves motor function because it requires hand-eye coordination, quick reflexes and balance, as well as enhancing cognitive skills such as decision-making.

The nonprofit has been a "smashing success", with over 300 chapters in 25 countries and an inaugural tournament held earlier this month in New York.

One player picked up the game as a way to cope with symptoms such as tremors, slow movement and depression.

"I just can't get enough of it," he told the *New York Post*.

"When I play ping pong, I just feel my brain come alive."

Participants rave that the rhythmic movements and social interaction have boosted their mood and helped delay the progression of their symptoms.

Another participant noted that a tremor in his right hand has disappeared since playing, although declined to say it was definitely down to the game.

Yet another said it helps her track her improvement, as well as share her experiences with the group.

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