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Victoria first to move on digital scripts

PHARMACISTS in Victoria are the first in the country to be authorised to dispense Schedule 4 medicines using digital images of prescriptions sent directly to them by a prescriber.

The decision, announced by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services Secretary, Kym Peake, yesterday, follows the Federal Government's special arrangement to recognise electronic prescriptions for Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) subsidies, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the Victorian measure prescribers will no longer be required to send the original copy of the prescription to the pharmacy, but will need to retain it on file for two years, while pharmacists will need to record that the dispensing of the medication was done under the public health emergency order, with a requirement that the electronic version of the script

must be held by the pharmacy for two years.

Pharmacy Guild of Australia Victorian Branch President, Anthony Tassone, told *Pharmacy Daily* that the measure would streamline pharmacists' work, as they respond to increasing numbers of prescriptions dispensed following telehealth consultations.

"There are still challenges adapting to these new workflows that pharmacies are doing their best to respond to," he said.

"This is a good thing.

"It is sensible in the circumstances and aligns to a special order that was made by the Commonwealth.

"I would implore other states and territories to follow suit."

Tassone added the Guild had been in contact with the Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners to ensure their members were aware of the issues covered by the emergency measures.



"What doctors must understand is under this emergency order in Victoria, is it doesn't apply to drugs of dependence or S8 medicines," he said.

"So, if they are practising telehealth and prescribe these medicines, then under Victorian-based legislation, a verbal or oral order would be required for the pharmacist to be able to dispense the supply, with the original prescription to be sent to the pharmacy."

Today's issue of *PD*

Pharmacy Daily today has three pages of news plus a full page from **Sigma Connect**.

MedAdvisor delivers

ROLLOUT of MedAdvisor's new home delivery service started yesterday in Brisbane, with facility set to be introduced to Melbourne and Sydney later this month.

The digital medication management company announced its decision to fast track its delivery service last month (*PD* 27 Mar) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The service utilises Kings Transport and will allow pharmacies to provide a free delivery service for patients within a 5km radius of the store, under the Federal Government's funding package.



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Nationalised meds supply an option

MOVES to temporarily nationalise the pharmaceutical wholesaling sector to ensure equity of access to medicines across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, should not be ruled out, the Rural Pharmacy Network Australia (RPNA) believes.

In a statement issued this morning the group, which represents pharmacists operating in rural and remote areas flagged concerns about the supply chain.

"Australia now more than ever needs a system such as the Community Service Obligation (CSO) to ensure equity of access to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicines for all Australians," a spokesperson said.

"Events of the past five to six weeks have shown that the CSO does not function in the way that has been touted.

"The [Federal] Government has sought to intervene by adjusting wholesaler deeds, allowing

wholesalers to collaborate and so on.

"But these interventions are not addressing the root cause of the problems.

"The CSO is supposed to be about equity of access but has never been used solely for that purpose.

"COVID-19 may be a 'force majeure' event, but it has exposed the systemic problems with pharmaceutical distribution in Australia.

"It is not acceptable to treat this as a one-off event and try and smooth things over, or to try to rebuild the same flawed system after the virus is controlled.

"Deeper consideration needs to be given as to how the CSO can be re-engineered so that it actually provides equity of access to PBS medicines for all Australians rather than just pretend to.

"RPNA is calling on the Commonwealth to delve deep into

the problems of the CSO system and consider radical options such as temporarily nationalising the medicine supply chain for the duration of the pandemic and eventually returning wholesalers to cooperative ownership by s90 Approved pharmacists.

"It is only by making the wholesalers 100% accountable to their market and the principles of PBS Equity of Access that another systemic failure of the pharmaceuticals supply chain can be avoided."

Pharmacies turn COVID refuges

VICTIMS of domestic violence in Europe are being urged to visit their local pharmacy for help, amid concerns of a spike in abuse stemming from COVID-19-related lockdown measures.

CNN reported that a woman in the French city of Nancy was the first to approach a pharmacist about her abusing, using a codeword "mask 19", as a signal for the pharmacist to act under a national campaign.

The pharmacist's action led to the arrest of the abuser.

Speaking at the Australian Pharmacy Professional (APP) Conference last month, former Australian of the Year, Rosie Batty, had flagged concerns about the impact COVID-19 could have on family violence, urging pharmacists to be vigilant and to call 000 if they had concerns for a patient.

Telehealth not just video calls: RACGP

PATIENTS who may not be comfortable using video conferencing platforms such as FaceTime, Zoom or Skype are being urged to pick up the phone if they want to speak to their GP.

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) President, Dr Harry Nespolon, stressed the need for the public to understand that Medicare subsidised GP consultations are

not limited to video calls.

"It's important to emphasise to all patients that the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) item does apply for telephone consultations, not just Skype, Zoom and FaceTime and the like," he said.

"We can't have the public or GPs think that this MBS item is limited to video consultations; an old-fashioned phone will do just fine."

ACT cuts pharmacist flu jab age limit

PHARMACISTS in the ACT will be authorised to administer influenza vaccinations to patients aged 10-years and older, and pregnant women, as part of the Territory's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The decision announced this morning has also granted pharmacist immunisers in the Territory, the ability to provide the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine to patients on a private basis (**PD** breaking news).

Welcoming the announcement, Pharmacy Guild of Australia ACT Branch President, Simon Blacker, thanked the Territory Government, saying the move would provide patients with greater choice when seeking flu vaccination services.

"It is a positive and timely step ahead of what threatens to be another bad season for influenza," he said.

"With the public health focus squarely on COVID-19, it is very important that as many people as



possible in the ACT are protected against contracting influenza, so that they are fit and healthy as we strive to minimise the impact of COVID-19."

The expansion of pharmacist vaccination services in the ACT comes just days after the Territory Government announced emergency dispensing measures (**PD** 06 Apr), bringing it into line with other States and the Northern Territory in allowing pharmacists to dispense maximum Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) quantities to patients without a prescription.

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Dispensary Corner

NO FERTILITY drugs needed - just a bit of privacy.

That was the curious outcome at Hong Kong's Ocean Park Zoo, which has for over a decade been trying to get two of its pandas to produce offspring.

Long-time residents Ying Ying and Le Le are now finally "doing it" after 10 years of failed attempts at natural mating.

It appears that being on display was putting them off, because the panda pair are now "getting it on" during a bit of peace and quiet due to the zoo's COVID-19 closure.

While it is still too early to tell definitively whether a baby might be on the way, Ying Ying's body and behaviour are being closely monitored, with zoo authorities saying "we hope to bear wonderful pregnancy news to Hong Kongers this year".

THE dramatic total shutdown of normal life in New Zealand is having a big effect on the spread of COVID-19, but some things just have to keep going.

NZ Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has relaxed some of her very strict policies in recent days, formally confirming that the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy can continue their vital activities as "essential services".

"But as you can imagine they're going to be potentially quite busy at home with their family...so I say to the children of NZ: If the Easter Bunny doesn't make it to your household, we have to understand it's a bit difficult at the moment for the bunny to get everywhere".

COVID accommodation

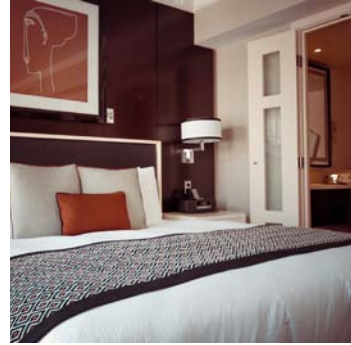
PHARMACY staff in NSW will be among the frontline health professionals entitled to access hotel accommodation to keep a safe distance from at-risk family members during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the measure, the hotel industry, including home-sharing platform Airbnb, and the NSW Department of Health have established a register to help frontline staff book a room where they can stay during the crisis.

The move announced by the State Government has been welcomed by Pharmacy Guild of Australia NSW Branch President, who noted a similar program in Western Australia had already seen a number of health professionals housed in hotel accommodation to protect their families.

"Pharmacists have been on the frontline since the COVID-19 crisis began, and we will be here until the end," Heffernan said.

"In doing their job, pharmacists have been abused, punched, spat



on, and even had medicine bottles thrown at them by a tiny minority of patients.

"It's fantastic to see the hotel industry offer accommodation to healthcare workers, who can't go home out of fear of spreading this virus to their families."

"Equally, the Berejiklian Government and the NSW Department of Health should be congratulated for taking accommodation providers up on their offer to help the professionals who care for us, care for their families."

NPS hydroxychloroquine concerns

AUSTRALIANS are being urged not to experiment with supposed wonder drugs touted as treatments for COVID-19, including anti-malaria, rheumatoid arthritis and lupus treatment, hydroxychloroquine.

NPS MedicineWise Medicines Line Manager and pharmacist, Nerida Packham, said patients and prescribers should follow the latest evidence-based advice from trusted sources, rather than the latest headline.

"Further studies are needed to assess whether hydroxychloroquine is effective

against COVID-19 outside of the hospital setting, and there is only very limited evidence of effectiveness in hospitals," Packham said.

"It is particularly important to be medicewise during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"For anyone who needs to continue taking hydroxychloroquine to treat chronic conditions, speak to your doctor for advice.

"The [Federal] Government is working with pharmacists to ensure you can still access hydroxychloroquine."

Tweet of thanks

NSW Deputy Premier, John Barilaro, has taken to social media to praise the "amazing" efforts being made by pharmacy staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"To all of our local pharmacists and pharmacy staff on the frontline caring for our communities and keeping use healthy during these unprecedented times, thank you," he said.

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