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Canadian
Pharmacists
Association Association des
pharmaciens
du Canada

The Weekly

Bringing the world of pharmacy together

January 19, 2022

CPhA

CPhA releases National Call to Action in support of pharmacy professionals

With the COVID-19 pandemic and the Omicron variant pushing pharmacists and their staff to the breaking point, pharmacies are struggling with staff shortages, staff exposure to COVID-19, administrative overload, and testing and PPE access issues. Pharmacy professionals require more support from all levels of government to continue to serve their communities and keep themselves and their patients safe and healthy. CPhA is urging governments and regulators to implement a series of [calls to action](#) to support the pharmacy profession through this very difficult time. The calls to action include removing unnecessary administrative and regulatory burdens on pharmacies; ensuring dedicated access to COVID-19 testing and PPE (e.g., N95 masks) for pharmacy staff; expanding the labour supply of pharmacists and pharmacy support staff; enabling a full scope of pharmacy practice to ensure pharmacy teams can provide the most appropriate and timely care to their patients; publicly funding health services provided by pharmacists as they are for nurses and physicians; and working to harmonize a full scope of pharmacy practice across Canada to improve health equity and enable pharmacists and pharmacy resources to travel between provinces to relieve pressures in emergency situations.

Upcoming webinar: SOS Code Orange! Ensuring business continuity during COVID-19

Designated as essential services, pharmacies are often one of the only services that must remain open, even when primary care options are unavailable. Pharmacists have a professional obligation to ensure the continuity of patient care even in the unfortunate event of an emergency closure. Increasingly, with staff shortages and illness-related absenteeism, pharmacies have to develop plans to ensure business continuity and mitigate operational risks that can impede patient care. Join our speakers, Dr. Kaitlyn Watson, Diane Harpell and Christine Antler, on January 27 from 3:00–4:00 pm ET as we discuss practical solutions and explore creative approaches to maintaining pharmacy operations. [Register now](#).

Pharmacists on the front line

Front-line pharmacists 'hitting a wall'

Amid the most contagious wave of COVID-19 to date, and as Canadians approach 2 full years of living with pandemic restrictions and health precautions, many say they are hitting a wall when it comes to their mental, physical and emotional well-being, [CBC reports](#). For frontline workers, including pharmacists, who may be working longer hours or double duty to cover for sick colleagues, burnout is particularly acute. “People have been putting in crazy long days,” said Manjeet Lotey, a pharmacist in Edmonton. “We’re doing all these shots and then . . . we still have a pharmacy to run, too. A lot of my colleagues are burnt out. All we talk about is some people regret coming into this profession at one point because we’re asked to do so much—and we’re happy to do it, but it just gets hard.” Calgary pharmacist Brad Couldwell similarly [told the Calgary Herald](#) he’s been doing his best to keep soldiering on through the pandemic. “The majority of our day is helping people, and guiding them through the plethora of information,” he said. With the Omicron variant’s unprecedented contagiousness, he says he’s been lucky to avoid catching it thus far. Couldwell said he feels bad for colleagues who are short-staffed due to illness. “I know everybody is overloaded,” he said.

Niagara-area pharmacy partners with town for mass vaccination clinic

Siva Sivapalan had a problem. The pharmacist-owner of the Shoppers Drug Mart in Beamsville, Ontario, wanted to be able to deliver vaccines to as many people as possible, more than he could do out of his pharmacy. Enter Cathy McGrath, the emergency management co-ordinator for Niagara West Fire & Emergency Services. She had the solution Sivapalan was looking for. McGrath arranged for the community centre and arena—currently closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic—to be opened for Sivapalan to host a clinic, and that’s just what happened on January 15. “We’re focusing on keeping the community safe,” Sivapalan [told Niagara This Week](#), as the first of hundreds of sleeves were rolled up. “We couldn’t do this at the store.” On a typical day, Sivapalan said the pharmacy may be able to manage 100 shots. At the clinic, that number would increase dramatically to almost 400 people, half whom he said would be early childhood education workers who would be receiving a booster shot.

Montreal pharmacist sets out to boost immunocompromised patients safely

Montreal pharmacist Daron Basmadjian is opening his pharmacy on the next few Saturdays

specifically to give COVID-19 booster doses to immunocompromised people who might not feel comfortable in a more crowded location. “Some of them are petrified to go to a mass vaccination centre or crowded pharmacy,” Basmadjian [told the Montreal Gazette](#). “They feel like they have been forgotten about during the pandemic and they’re grateful that someone is taking time to think about them.” Only 1 customer will be allowed in the pharmacy at a time. Patients can wear a blue medical mask over their N95 mask, if they have one, and a health questionnaire will be filled out ahead of time to reduce the amount of time spent in Basmadjian’s office. After their booster shot, they will be permitted to stay in their car during the mandatory 15-minute observation period. “I’m happy to give them a secure place to help protect their immunity a little bit,” Basmadjian said. “Nothing is zero risk. But this is as low as the risk can get.”

Provincial

Inventory shortages possible at southern Alberta pharmacies

Operational challenges at a wholesale provider for pharmacies has created inventory shortages in southern Alberta, according to [CHAT News Today](#). McKesson Canada works with manufacturers to deliver vaccines, over the counter drugs, specialty medications and consumer products. With distribution centres across the country, McKesson Canada provides distribution for 1350 hospitals and 7100 pharmacies. In a statement, McKesson Canada spokesperson Andrew Forgione said the company is being challenged by a rise in COVID-19-related absenteeism in the company and a switch to a new transportation partner. Greg Bueckert, owner and pharmacist at Greg’s Remedy’s Drugs in Medicine Hat, said he expects the disruptions to last at least another 6 months. “You really can’t make any promises and yet you have people being released from hospital. They need their meds and normally they would have them.” Bueckert couldn’t get into the specifics of what is unavailable but said they’re having trouble getting 30 to 40 types of medication.

Ontario hospitals face shortages of critical drugs to treat COVID-19 patients

Ontario hospitals are facing shortages of critical drugs to treat COVID-19 patients amid a surge of cases, forcing some physicians to choose which patients receive potentially life-saving care, while others don’t have access to the drugs at all, [the Toronto Star reports](#). In anticipation of an Omicron-fuelled rise in cases, many hospitals in December had already started to ration key COVID-19 therapeutics—in short supply across many regions—to patients who would benefit the most. But drug shortages have escalated in the last week alongside a crush of COVID-19 patients needing care in the medical wards and ICU units, with at least 1 Toronto-area hospital instituting a lottery system to determine which patients will receive a dose of a potentially life-saving medication. Networks of pharmacists and physicians are sharing information on how to access therapeutics and how to share any available doses, prioritizing hard-hit hospitals.

New Brunswick pharmacists see slower-than-expected demand for pediatric COVID-19 vaccine

Pharmacists in New Brunswick have seen a slower-than-expected demand for first doses of the

COVID-19 vaccine for children 5 to 11, [according to CBC](#). “There aren’t that many bookings. There are only a few hundred a day and that’s spread around 130 pharmacies,” said Jake Reid, executive director of the New Brunswick Pharmacists’ Association. “It does seem to be a relatively slow pace for people getting out and getting their first dose.” Public health officials were hopeful before Christmas that first doses would be administered to 50% of children aged 5-11 by the end of 2021. “We only just crossed that threshold . . . just a few days ago,” Reid said. “That would tell me that it is going slower than anticipated.” Reid added he’s not sure why the pace is slowing down, but it’s not a lack of vaccines. “Inventory is not an issue at this point. For the pharmacies administering the pediatric vaccines, they have the ability to get as much as they want,” he said.

National

Join us for National Kids and Vaccines Day

Leading child and youth organizations across Canada, including Children’s Healthcare Canada, ScienceUpFirst and the Sandbox Project, have joined forces to declare Thursday, January 27 as National Kids and Vaccines Day. This day will bring together industry, influencers and experts from across disciplines to help move the needle and promote vaccine confidence to protect the largest unvaccinated cohort of Canadians. Follow the hashtag #KidsVaccinesDay on Twitter or visit the [ScienceUpFirst website](#) to find out more about additional events, resources and partners. Download [the National Kids and Vaccines Day announcement](#) and help spread the word.

Vast majority of Canadians alarmed about COVID-19 strain on health-care system: poll

Almost half of Canadians are worried about not being able to receive proper care if they were to get sick due to the strain the Omicron COVID-19 variant is placing on the health-care system, [CityNews reports](#). The new survey from Maru Public Opinion found the vast majority of those polled—over 80%—are alarmed about the impact of the Omicron variant on their local health-care system and hospitals. Most Canadians are aware of the local hospital staffing shortages caused by the virus as many deal with unplanned absences. Almost 40% of those polled know someone who has had treatment for serious medical issues postponed, while 33% know someone who wasn’t able to receive treatment at all. In addition, 4 in 10 Canadians indicated they don’t have confidence that if they need medical care in their local hospital right now that they could be admitted for a few days of treatment. Another 17% reported they have a medical condition that has worsened over the past 3 months because they have not been able to go to see a health professional due to COVID-19.

International

US: CVS and Walgreens temporarily shut some stores as Omicron cases soar

CVS and Walgreens—2 of the biggest pharmacy chains in the United States—temporarily closed some stores last weekend because of staff shortages complicated by the soaring number of

people infected with the Omicron variant, [the New York Times reports](#). Mike DeAngelis, a spokesperson for CVS, said the “vast majority” of stores were operating with normal hours this past weekend. “A tiny fraction of stores are temporarily closed on 1 or both days of the weekend to help address acute staffing issues amidst both the Omicron surge and the workforce shortage affecting nearly every industry and company,” he said. Rebekah Pajak, a spokesperson for Walgreens, said closures were at a “small percentage” of the company’s more than 9000 stores and in most cases, the affected stores were open at least 1 weekend day. “When making the difficult decision to adjust store hours, we make every effort to minimize disruption for our customers,” Pajak said. “We select days with the lowest prescription demand, ensure that there is a nearby pharmacy to meet any immediate prescription needs and provide patients as much advanced notice as possible through signage, automated phone calls and adjustments in refills.”

UK: Boots launches UK-wide palliative care service in more than 2000 pharmacies

Boots UK has partnered with the National Health Service (NHS) and Macmillan Cancer Support to deliver a community pharmacy palliative care service across the UK, [Chemist+Druggist reports](#). The service, which launched in more than 2000 pharmacies on January 18, will help ease access to “vital medicines” and advice for terminally ill patients. Boots has also collaborated with Macmillan and the NHS to produce “a list of recommended medicines most used by terminally ill patients.” Boots has committed to “maintaining stock of medicines on this list” in its pharmacies with an NHS contract. Pharmacists received additional training in palliative care in preparation for the service, helping them to “understand more about the impact of a cancer diagnosis, treatments and how to support people living with, and affected by, cancer,” Boots said. The training has added to “the depth and range of cancer-related advice” pharmacists can offer, while also equipping them to support patients through illnesses other than cancer.

Australia: Overworked pharmacists struggle to access COVID-19 vaccines and RATs

Pharmacists across Australia are buckling under soaring workloads and the pressure of securing COVID-19 vaccines and testing supplies, as more than 90% report problems sourcing in-demand rapid antigen tests (RATs). [A survey](#) conducted by Professional Pharmacists Australia (PPA), the representative body for employee pharmacists, has revealed widespread discontent within an industry burdened with ever-increasing responsibilities as a result of the federal government’s failure to prepare for the current outbreak. According to the survey, 86% of pharmacists reported the vaccine rollout was having a “significant” or “extreme” impact on their workload, and 75% said having to provide RATs was also having a “significant” or “extreme” impact on their workload. In addition to the 94% having problems sourcing RATs, a third of the 400-plus respondents were struggling to obtain enough vaccines to meet demand. PPA CEO Jill McCabe said the survey results reveal a pharmacy system buckling under the weight of ever-increasing responsibilities, without adequate consultation with working pharmacists. “This situation is beyond dire. Pharmacists are telling us they are extremely overworked and under significant pressure and that they do not have the supplies and equipment they need to do their jobs properly,” McCabe said.

In-Depth

A Paxlovid primer: What to know about the new oral antiviral treatment for COVID-19

Health Canada authorized the first at-home, oral treatment for COVID-19 on January 17. But what is Paxlovid, how does it work, and who can get it? Here are [some answers](#) from health experts, including CPhA's Chief Pharmacist Officer, Dr. Danielle Paes.

For additional details on Paxlovid, the product monograph and information for patients are now available on CPS: Drug Information and CPS: Full Access.

Worth Repeating

"It can't be emphasized enough that the core messages COVID deniers are pushing are simply wrong. Their positions haven't been silenced. On the contrary, they have been considered, thoroughly researched, and found to be incorrect." —Timothy Caulfield, Canada Research Chair in health law and policy at the University of Alberta, [writes in an opinion piece](#) in the *Globe and Mail* that correcting COVID-19 misinformation does not equate to cancel culture.

This weekly update is compiled by the Canadian Pharmacists Association. Please note that this publication is meant to inform and is not a comprehensive list of information available. Be sure to check with your provincial regulatory authority or advocacy association for province-specific information. While we aim to ensure all information contained in this update is accurate, the situation is evolving rapidly and CPhA does not take responsibility for the content provided by other organizations and sources.

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