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Canadian
Pharmacists
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Association des
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du Canada

The Weekly

Bringing the world of pharmacy together

January 5, 2022

CPhA

CPhA in 2021: Take a look back

From unveiling a new brand, to launching our new strategic plan, 2021 was all about repositioning CPhA for what comes next while continuing to support pharmacists on the front line during the pandemic. It was a busy one. Take [a look back](#) at our activities and initiatives in 2021.

Pharmacists on the front line

N95 and rapid testing shortage hits Calgary pharmacies

Aisha Okasha goes to work every day with high anxiety over COVID-19. The owner and pharmacist at Lynnwood Drugs said the Alberta government has shifted COVID-19 testing and supply of PPE onto pharmacies, but has not given them the supply or resources to meet the demand, she [told the Calgary Herald](#). This has been exacerbated in the past 2 weeks by the Omicron variant, which has come with recommendations for the use of N95 masks and put more emphasis on the use of rapid test kits supplied by the government. Except Okasha's pharmacy hasn't had either for some time. "We are very overworked and we are very stressed out. I think what's put on us is way too much for us to handle right now," said Okasha. "All the frustration is coming to us because we are front line and people do not know where to show their frustration." The pharmacy has not been able to get N95 masks from suppliers for a few months. Not only do they not have them for sale for customers, but also they do not have them for their own staff

when administering rapid antigen tests or vaccines.

Pandemic heroes of 2021: Pharmacists

To mark how far we've come during the COVID-19 pandemic, the [Toronto Star profiled](#) 20 people—including pharmacist Kyro Maseh—who helped get more than 25 million doses into arms. Maseh and his team at the Lawlor Pharmacy in the Beaches neighbourhood decided to mark daily milestones in a big, loud way. Maseh became known as the bell-ringing pharmacist, who would ring a bell and yell “shots in the arm!” While his staff would respond, like a scout chant, “COVID’s gone!” He also threw a major bash for the 1000th shot the pharmacy administered near the end of April, full of confetti and music. “I try to make a point in my day-to-day, in my practice, to always reassure people who receive health care, have an enjoyable experience in the process, and do my best to lift up their spirits,” he said.

Provincial

Pharmacist named CTV Regina’s 2021 Citizen of the Year

Pharmacist Sarah Kozusko has been named CTV Regina’s Citizen of the Year for 2021. “It’s overwhelming,” Kozusko [told CTV](#). Kozusko was born in Regina and graduated from the University of Saskatchewan College of Pharmacy and Nutrition. She is now the store operator and pharmacy manager of Queen City Wellness Clinic. This pharmacy has grown into a hub and safe space for people from all walks of life to get advice or just warm up or cool off. The pharmacy provides free water, coffee and healthy snacks to people experiencing homelessness or anyone who can’t afford food that day. There is a public phone set up in the lobby so anyone can call emergency services, social services or their family members. Kozusko said the pharmacy also works with other organizations in the city, like Carmichael Outreach and All Nations Hope, to find people a counsellor or the support they need. “The barriers that are in place to reach the available resources is difficult, so everything we do is to help people overcome those barriers,” Kozusko added. During the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination rollout, Kozusko also went to various community organizations to administer vaccines.

Some NS pharmacy staff being asked to provide false vaccination records

Staff of some NS pharmacies have been asked by members of the public to provide falsified vaccination records, according to Diane Harpell, the chair of the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia (PANS). Harpell [told CBC](#) the issue has hit quite close to home, with one of her own staff being asked for a false record. “One of my immunizers here in my pharmacy was actually asked by a patient to give them a record and offered to pay money,” she said. “I’m not sure if it was a joke. Obviously, we didn’t go ahead with it, but they did ask it and they ended up getting the vaccine and not going ahead with this plan.” According to Harpell, the cases she heard about were earlier in the year, but the issue has been discussed in the pharmacy community. She said PANS and the Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists, the province’s pharmacy regulator, issued notices reminding pharmacy staff to check identification and informing people about what was required to prevent any potential fraud.

Benzodiazepines becoming a major problem in illicit drug supply

According to a report by the BC Coroners Service, “benzos” or “benzodope,” as it’s called in the street, is the new scourge of BC’s contaminated drug supply, [CBC reports](#). Some people are knocked out for hours or a whole day, and harm reduction sites say people passed out in a public place can be robbed or sexually assaulted while they’re unconscious. Sarah Blyth, the executive director of the Overdose Prevention Society, said benzos started popping up randomly in drug checking and are now everywhere, like when fentanyl was first introduced. “People completely black out, they don’t know who they are sometimes, where they are,” she said. “It’s leaving people with long-term damage, if they don’t die.” Between July 2020 and October 2021, the detection rate of benzodiazepines in BC went from 15% to 53%, according to the BC Coroners Service’s illicit drug toxicity report in December. Fentanyl is still detected in an overwhelming majority of illicit drug deaths and drug samples, but the unpredictability and potency of these other substances are making the supply more dangerous, the report says.

National

Prime Minister gets COVID-19 booster shot at Ottawa pharmacy

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has joined the ranks of Canadians who are rolling up their sleeves for COVID-19 booster shots, [the Canadian Press reports](#). Trudeau received his third shot at an Ottawa pharmacy on January 4. The prime minister arrived around 8:00 a.m. and could be seen chatting with the pharmacist as the shot was prepared. Afterwards, the prime minister flashed a thumbs up to the cameras and urged Canadians to get vaccinated. Provinces have been racing to deliver booster shots as COVID-19 case counts and hospitalizations continue to surge to new heights.

140M rapid tests, more pediatric COVID-19 doses coming this month, feds say

By the end of the month, there will be enough pediatric COVID-19 doses in Canada for all eligible children, and 140 million additional rapid tests will be delivered to provinces and territories, the federal government announced January 5, [CTV reports](#). Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that the federal government would “quadruple” December’s fulfilled request from the provinces and territories for 35 million rapid tests. Trudeau also confirmed that there are enough COVID-19 vaccines in Canada now for all adults who are eligible to receive their first, second or booster doses. As well, Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos said that by the end of January, the government expects to have enough supply in the country for all eligible children to receive both doses.

International

US: Some pharmacies don’t have enough technicians to keep up with demand

In recent months, many US pharmacy technicians have quit, saying they’re being asked to do too much for too little pay, [KARE-TV reports](#). Across the country, there are some 420 000

pharmacy technicians who make about US\$17 an hour. They're also doing the lion's share of what can be complex work, according to the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP), a non-profit that represents state boards of pharmacies. The workload at community pharmacies also increased during the pandemic and now includes administering COVID-19 tests, immunizations and therapies. "You're front and center to any and every person that walks through the door," said NABP's Executive Director Al Carter. And with that, he added, the potential for prescription error goes up with growing stress, the risk too much for some employees. "Which is why you have the burnout and so many people walking away because they don't want to do harm," Carter said. The National Community Pharmacists Association first identified the technician staffing shortage in the spring of 2021 when a survey found 90% of respondents couldn't fill that job—a deficit that's also driving up benefits and doubling wages. Some pharmacies are also decreasing workloads and adding worker protections, while an online campaign is raising money to create a union.

US: Aging pharmacists leave pharmacies vacant across rural America

Pharmacies were once routinely bequeathed from one generation to the next but, [according to Kaiser Health News](#), some pharmacists say the pressure of running an independent pharmacy has them pushing their children toward other careers. And when they search for a buyer, they often find that attracting new pharmacists, especially to rural settings, is difficult. With a large group of pharmacists nearing retirement age, more communities may lose their only pharmacy. "It's going to be harder to attract people and to pay them," said David Kreling, a professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Pharmacy. "If there's not a generational thing where someone can sit down with their son or daughter and say that they could take the pharmacy over, there's a good chance that pharmacy will evaporate." Studies have found the number of pharmacists nationally to be sufficient, even more than enough, to meet current needs, although supply and demand don't always line up. Finding pharmacists is more difficult in rural areas. Now, as the demand for pharmacists to provide testing and vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic increases, pharmacy chains are offering incentives—such as large salaries, signing bonuses and help paying off school loans—that are often more enticing than anything a rural pharmacy could muster.

US: Florida poised to become first state to import prescription drugs from Canada

Plans to import cheaper prescription drugs from Canada have been in the works for years. In Florida, it may finally happen sooner than many may think—possibly as soon as early 2022, [according to FOX 13 News](#). Florida Health Care Administration Secretary Simone Marstiller recently told a state Senate panel, "I would hope we could start importing [in] the first quarter of the new year." Helping to push the idea along is the fact that President Joe Biden and Governor Ron DeSantis both support it. "If you have Canada drugs, the same drug costs 25% of what it costs here. We want Floridians to be able to share in those discounts," said DeSantis. The pharmaceutical lobby opposes the plan to import prescription drugs from Canada, however. The Partnership for Safe Medicines, a pharmaceutical lobbying group, has run ads questioning the safety of using drugs imported from other countries—one ad even stating, "Too many have already died from counterfeit drugs; are you willing to take that risk?" Drug supplies may also

pose a challenge because Canada cannot supply its own citizens while also having enough to go around for the US, or even all of Florida, for that matter. The shipments would have to be what's considered "excess" or "surplus" on the Canadian market.

US: Teva Pharmaceuticals found liable in New York opioid trial

A New York jury has found that drug maker Teva Pharmaceuticals and its affiliates helped fuel an opioid epidemic in the US state, [according to BBC](#). A lawsuit filed by the state's attorney general in 2019 accused Teva and other firms of aggressively marketing painkillers across the state, while doing nothing to minimize addiction. Damages the company will have to pay will be determined later. On December 30, Teva said it will appeal the verdict. The drugmaker argued at trial that it complied with federal and state regulations and denied engaging in deceptive marketing. In a statement, New York State Attorney General Letitia James said the jury found the firm and its affiliates liable for "death and destruction" across the US. "Teva Pharmaceuticals USA and others misled the American people about the true dangers of opioids," she said.

Australia: Queensland pharmacists call for calm amid RAT kit shortages in the regions

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia (PGA) is urging Queenslanders not to stockpile rapid antigen tests (RATs) amid shortages in the state's largest regional centres, [ABC reports](#). According to the PGA, prices are surging and supply is dwindling around the state after the Queensland government announced a shift in testing requirements. Trent Twomey, PGA's national president, said RAT supply is exceptionally volatile due to demand, but also price. "It's not just the actual quantity of the rapid antigen test landing in pharmacies that is unpredictable. It's also the price that they're landing in our pharmacies for," he said. Twomey said the PGA is working with the Commonwealth government on a "hybrid system" where government-funded RATs would be available for health-care workers and concession card holders (seniors, people with a disability, care givers, veterans, single parents, widows and students). "Then there'll be the free market for the rest of us," he said. "Now that we've got that national consistency the market will respond. It'll just take us a couple of weeks to settle down into what is the new COVID normal."

Europe: PGEU releases position paper on revision of EU general pharmaceutical legislation

The Pharmaceutical Group of European Union (PGEU) has responded to the European Commission Public Consultation on the revision of the European Union (EU) general pharmaceutical legislation and has [issued a position paper](#) that elaborates upon the response. European community pharmacists welcome a revision of the EU general pharmaceutical legislation as a tool to help ensure Europe's supply of safe and affordable medicines to meet patients' needs and to support the financial sustainability and the resilience of health systems. Both the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the unacceptable, increasingly negative impact medicine shortages have on patients access to medicines require bold, ambitious and coordinated actions at all policy levels, the report says. The EU has the powers within its areas of competence to play a more prominent role in creating and coordinating policies that bring meaningful solutions to patients and health-care professionals across Europe, whilst respecting

the differences in the organization of health-care systems across the EU.

In-Depth

Despite a place on pharmacy shelves, homeopathy has no role in patient care

Patients who believe that homeopathy will treat their disease may decide they no longer need their regular medications, putting their health at risk, Dr. Peter Zhang, a hospital pharmacist and an MBA candidate at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, writes [in a Toronto Star opinion piece](#).

COVID-19 testing capacity is overwhelmed. Here's how Canadians can still measure risk

Canada has lost sight of the true size of its pandemic, with the number of people infected with COVID-19 now a mystery, as the highly infectious Omicron variant overwhelms testing capacity across the country. So how do we track the impact Omicron is having across Canada? And how will we know whether public health restrictions are working if officials aren't collecting accurate data? CBC provides [this analysis](#).

Worth Repeating

"For all their imperfection, vaccines have saved millions of lives. People who are vaccinated have far better outcomes than those who are not, including lower rates of hospitalization and death; that's especially true for those who've had a booster."—the Globe and Mail's André Picard [writes](#) now is not the time to give in to Omicron despair

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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