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The Weekly: CPhA's Pharmacy News Update for November 24

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Canadian
Pharmacists
Association
Association des
pharmaciens
du Canada

The Weekly

Bringing the world of pharmacy together

November 24, 2021

CPhA

***COVID Conversations Panel TODAY at 5:00 pm ET. Learning to play your CARDS:
Improving the childhood vaccination experience***

As COVID-19 vaccines are approved for use in children aged 5 to 11, pharmacists are gearing up to jump into action as part of this next phase to protect our kids. Vaccinating children requires special considerations to ensure a safe, confident and successful campaign. Whether you'll be administering vaccines in your pharmacy or helping parents and kids understand the benefits of getting vaccinated, there's lots of information and best practices to wade through. This engaging panel session and Q&A will provide you with the information you need to confidently vaccinate children for COVID-19 and beyond. You'll hear from pediatric health and pharmacist experts who will review current guidelines and recent study data for children, offer tips and strategies to address vaccine hesitancy and needle fear, and discuss how to set up a kid-friendly vaccination environment and promote a positive experience. This webinar is presented by CPhA in partnership with Children's Healthcare Canada. Register [here](#).

CPhA CPO discusses pharmacy staffing shortages in Canada and US

Pharmacy in the US appears to be at a breaking point when it comes to staffing shortages—driven in large part by the still-evolving demands from COVID-19 and by a shortage of human resources, [Canadian Healthcare Network reports](#). But is a similar story unfolding in Canada? Data analysis by the job site Indeed.com pointed to an increase of almost 25% in the share of

job postings for pharmacists between October 2020 and October 2021. Of the total job postings for pharmacists during this period, 20% stayed open for 60 days or longer—a potential indicator that a role is hard to fill by employers. “The pandemic has caused a number of human resource challenges not just unique to pharmacy but across other industries,” said Danielle Paes, chief pharmacist officer at CPhA. “We’re hearing about increased vacancies in many parts of the country, not only for pharmacists but also pharmacy support staff.”

Some pharmacists recommend homeopathic products to treat kids’ cold and flu

Some pharmacists working in Canada’s top pharmacies are recommending homeopathic products to consumers, even though experts say these products are essentially sugar water or sugar pills with no scientific evidence they can do what they claim, [a CBC Marketplace investigation found](#). The investigation used hidden camera footage of 10 pharmacists in the Toronto area, 6 of which recommended homeopathic products when they were asked about giving it to a 3-year-old with cough and cold symptoms. CPhA told *Marketplace* that pharmacists should be “clear that scientific evidence does not support the effectiveness of homeopathic products and that this should be factored into the patient’s decision.” CPhA also provided *Marketplace* with detailed written responses which were [published](#) in an online article.

Pharmacists on the front line

How BC pharmacists handled drug rationing and helped those trapped, evacuated due to mudslides

During previous natural disasters that pharmacist-owner Carmen Pallot has lived through in 2021, supply kept coming into her pharmacy. But with the flooding in BC last week, the supply to Lillooet dried up, [according to Canadian Healthcare Network](#). Her pharmacy ran out of fast-acting insulin and statin medications. Her pharmacy, Pharmasave, and the Lillooet’s IDA pharmacy—the only other pharmacy in town—had to share and ration other medications. But the Lillooet pharmacies weren’t just dealing with locals. They had to help people stranded in town by the mudslide and others evacuated from nearby Merritt. Many needed medications, and Pallot and her team scrambled to care for everyone with limited supply. On November 20, Pallot said the town was down to just 2 vials of fast-acting insulin, held at the hospital. “I prioritized type 1 diabetics for the last stock of rapid insulin as they would have the most severe consequences from missing doses.” She told patients to go to the end of what they had and gave patients taking fast-acting insulin her cell phone number. In some cases, Pallot worked with patients to adjust and fine-tune their basal insulin levels.

Pharmacies working hard to prevent vaccine wastage

The number of COVID-19 vaccine doses wasted or expired in Alberta has increased substantially in the last 5 months. “To date, approximately 10% of the doses received into Alberta have been wasted or expired,” Alberta Health [told Global News](#). “Pharmacies in Alberta are working hard to limit the amount of wastage by block-scheduling patients,” said pharmacist Randy Howden, who owns 2 Medicine Shoppe locations. “But we want to make it as successful

as possible, so if someone walks in wanting their first or second dose, I will open that vial for them to make sure they have the vaccine.” In mid-October, the Alberta Pharmacists’ Association published a position statement on the Alberta Vaccine Booking System, which called for several changes, including adding “screening eligibility criteria for age, condition and vaccine spacing.” Howden said there have been instances at his 2 Calgary pharmacies in which people who were not eligible booked their vaccination appointment. He said not only does that translate into a thawed vial being potentially wasted, but it also often causes frustration that is taken out on pharmacists. Once opened, a Pfizer vial with 6 doses is good for 6 hours while a Moderna vial with 10 or 14 doses is good for 24 hours, according to Alberta Health.

Provincial

Youngest eligible Manitobans can get COVID-19 vaccine at pharmacies

Manitoba pharmacists will be allowed to vaccinate all kids age 5 to 11 as the COVID-19 vaccine for children rolls out, [says CBC](#). Previously, pharmacists in the province were limited to vaccinating people age 7 and older. The shift will also allow them to give seasonal flu vaccines to kids as young as 5. Pharmacists [called for the policy change](#) on November 8. Pharmacists Manitoba president Ashley Hart said the organization appreciates the government taking action on its request. “We believe that this policy change will help avoid the mass confusion and frustration which we had anticipated if there were an age discrepancy between the age of eligibility for COVID-19 vaccines, and the age which pharmacists are permitted to vaccinate,” Hart said in a statement.

Ontario defends plan to have pharmacies safely test people with COVID-19 symptoms

Ontario’s health minister defended a plan to allow people with COVID-19 symptoms to get tested for the virus in pharmacies, after some experts raised safety concerns, [the Canadian Press reports](#). Health Minister Christine Elliott told the legislature that pharmacies will take standard infection prevention and control measures, including mask wearing, physical distancing and having a dedicated space to perform the tests. Tim Brady, chair of the Ontario Pharmacists Association’s (OPA) board of directors, said there are several ways pharmacies can make customers feel safe as symptomatic testing ramps up. Brady owns 3 independent pharmacies in southwestern Ontario, and he said he plans to offer tests at only 1 of them, so people with safety concerns can avoid locations where symptomatic people will be. He said the OPA would also like to see the province allow pharmacists to go out to clients’ cars to perform the tests. “That way we’d still do the test, and you could really separate out the people,” he said. OPA said there’s big interest from its members in offering tests to symptomatic patients. More than 1,000 pharmacies have applied to offer the tests, compared to the 200 currently offering tests to asymptomatic customers.

National

Canada hopes to keep COVID-19 vaccine wastage under 5%, PHAC says

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) says it hopes to keep the number of wasted doses of COVID-19 vaccines in Canada to under 5%, [according to the Canadian Press](#). That would amount to 3.7 million of the 73.7 million vaccines that have been distributed to provinces and territories, used by the federal government, or held in the central vaccine inventory as of November 18. The federal, provincial and territorial governments aim to keep vaccine wastage as low as possible. The government warns, however, that as demand for COVID-19 vaccines slows down, there could be more wastage because new vials may have to be opened without every dose making it into someone's arm.

International

US: CVS to close 900 pharmacy stores as it shifts to online deliveries

The US pharmacy chain CVS plans to close around 900 stores over the next 3 years as it shifts its focus to online drug delivery, [the Independent reports](#). CVS Health, the pharmacy's parent company, said that it would shut down about 300 stores every year for the next 3 years, starting in spring 2022. Meanwhile it will "rapidly expand" its online services and open more primary care clinics and "HealthHubs" offering simple services such as therapy screenings and fitness classes. The closures, representing about 9% of the chain's 10 000 US stores, could exacerbate America's "pharmacy deserts"—areas of the country where getting to a drugstore requires significant travel. [Research has found](#) that in some major US cities 1 in 3 neighbourhoods is a pharmacy desert, with Black and Latino districts far more likely to qualify.

US: Pharmacy chains CVS, Walgreens, Walmart helped fuel opioid epidemic, US jury finds

A federal jury on November 23 found that pharmacy chain operators CVS Health Corp, Walgreens Boots Alliance and Walmart helped fuel an opioid epidemic in 2 Ohio counties, in the first trial the companies have faced over the US drug crisis, [according to Reuters](#). Jurors in Cleveland federal court after 6 days of deliberations concluded that actions by the pharmacy chains helped create a public nuisance that resulted in an oversupply of addictive pain pills and the diversion of those opioids to the black market. The verdict has the potential to give state and local governments new leverage in their efforts to negotiate settlements that would resolve thousands of other cases against the pharmacy operators. CVS, Walgreens and Walmart said they would appeal the verdict, arguing it ran contrary to the facts and that it misapplied public nuisance law to hold them liable under a novel legal theory that courts in California and Oklahoma have recently rejected in similar cases against drugmakers.

UK: Pharmacies close as NHS poaches staff

Community pharmacies are having to close their doors because of staff shortages caused by the National Health Service (NHS) poaching their workers, [according to the Times](#). More than 200 pharmacies closed for good last year, with many more cutting their hours in a trend that industry bodies say is making it hard for patients to access vital medication. They have also warned that plans for community pharmacies, aimed at easing pressure on general practitioners by taking on more care of minor illnesses, could also be scrapped by a lack of staff. NHS England documents

reveal that the health service plans to recruit an additional 3 000 pharmacists into primary care by 2024—a figure equivalent to 10% of the community pharmacy workforce.

Northern Ireland: Pharmacists to restrict non-funded service over pressures

Community pharmacists in Northern Ireland have said they will not accept new patients who require help managing their medicines at home due to increased demands on essential services, [BBC reports](#). Beginning December 1, they will not take on new patients who require daily medications being organized in medicine trays. They said the service involves an in-depth pharmacist consultation and ongoing collaboration with the patient, their family and the pharmacist. Community Pharmacy NI said, “Without the support from the department to do this, we have to protect core services until a solution can be found.” According to the organization, mounting pressure on staff as they administer COVID-19 vaccines and booster shots has meant they have had to prioritize commissioned and essential services. Medicine trays or “compliance aid services” is not a commissioned service or funded by the health service, but Community Pharmacy NI said that until now, it had been a service they had largely been providing on a “goodwill basis.” About 37 000 people in Northern Ireland use the service, which is seen as a lifeline to many.

Australia: Pharmacists poised to receive massive respiratory care boost

Australians living with asthma and other chronic respiratory conditions will soon get more coordinated, effective care from their local pharmacist thanks to a new specialist taskforce, [according to Mirage News](#). The taskforce, chaired by respiratory expert professor Sinthia Bosnic-Anticevich, will ensure community pharmacists are better supported to educate people about respiratory conditions, support correct medication use and identify those high-risk patients who need additional medical care. “Pharmacists are uniquely positioned to identify the key issues with a person’s asthma or COPD and direct them towards the right kind of care,” Bosnic-Anticevich explained. “They have far better access to patients than any other health care provider, but too often this access is underutilized, and opportunities to check, monitor and advise both patients and prescribers are lost. Through the formation of this specialist taskforce, pharmacists will be better informed about new emerging treatments and changes in disease management guidelines, and better able to effectively help these patients.”

Australia: Return of skilled migration program welcomed by Pharmacy Guild

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia [has welcomed](#) the Skilled Migration Program being included as part of the re-opening of the country’s borders on December 1 this year. The national president of the Pharmacy Guild, Trent Twomey, said the program was an important step in helping to address serious workforce shortages in a number of occupations across Australia. “One occupation which has been feeling the effects of a lack of skilled and qualified people is community pharmacy,” Twomey said. “Community pharmacies are currently struggling with workforce shortages and workforce distribution inequities. These issues compound the challenges that community pharmacies face in providing services, especially to regional rural and remote populations. These tend to have high rates of chronic disease, lower health literacy

and socioeconomic status and therefore are in greater need of more healthcare support. In many of these regional, rural and remote areas of Australia, the workforce shortage has been acute at times,” he added. The guild advocated strongly and successfully to have pharmacists returned to the Priority Migration Skilled Occupation List to help fill workforce gaps.

In-Depth

Are the new COVID-19 pills a pandemic game-changer?

The COVID-19 drugs have finally arrived—almost. For the first time, people infected with COVID-19 may soon be able take a pill (or 40) to reduce their risk of hospitalization and death. Is this a pandemic game-changer? The jury is still out on that question, and it will be for a while. At the very least, it’s another positive development (along with the arrival of pediatric vaccines) at a time when we need it, as vaccine protection wanes and COVID-19 cases start to climb anew, [according to *Globe and Mail* columnist André Picard](#).

Worth Repeating

“Again with another disaster, I’m so proud to be a pharmacist and proud of how everyone is stepping up yet again.” — BCPHA president Annette Robinson [praises](#) pharmacists’ dedication during the catastrophic floods of last week in BC

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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