

Mixed views on Coalition e-health plan

Nick O'Donoghue

PLANS by the Coalition to abandon the Federal Government's \$467 million investment in e-health should they gain power have received mix reactions from pharmacy's leading bodies.

Pharmaceutical Society of Australia president Warwick Plunkett said the decision would be detrimental to the health of consumers.

"There is no doubt that the development of the e-health policy has been overly expensive and its implementation delayed far too long, but at this stage it would be unwise to simply abolish this strategy.

"It will give pharmacists access to essential patient health information to allow

better outcomes to be delivered by the pharmacy profession. Through e-health, the delivery of e-prescribing is now within our grasp with little additional investment required," Mr Plunkett said.

However Pharmacy Guild of Australia president Kos Sclavos insisted e-prescribing had the support of both sides of parliament and pharmacists would be able to continue using the aspects of e-health set out in the Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement.

"The Agreement money is locked away and electronic prescriptions have the support of both the Coalition and the ruling Labor government.

"I believe it's pharmacy's time to shine... what I see now, while everybody is arguing

over electronic health records, pharmacy has the ability to get on with the job," he told *Pharmacy eNews*.

Mr Sclavos added the success of pharmacy's work in e-health was the reason e-prescribing would remain.

"The problem with e-health is governments have spent hundreds of millions of dollars of wasted money, because they've been projects that haven't gone to completion.

"Whereas we've taken the risk out, they're not backing some sort of proposal, they're backing a working model... to be frank, if there'd been any doubt that e-prescriptions would work we wouldn't have got any funding in the Agreement," he said.

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Inconsistent regulation could force R&D overseas

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AUSTRALIA is at risk of losing its "brightest minds" and reputation as a leading destination for clinical trials if regulatory barriers are not removed.

Medicines Australia chief executive Dr Brendan Shaw warned inconsistent processes for ethical approval for trials in different states has been acting "like a handbrake" and could force research and development overseas.

While the Federal Government has established the Clinical Trials Action Group to encourage clinical trials in Australia, Dr Shaw said it was important to minimise the hurdles to setting up trials.

"Australia is at the cutting edge

of clinical research but our long-term attractiveness as a location for clinical trials is under threat from emerging economies such as India, China, Russia and Brazil.

"We need to ensure that we can maintain and grow a sufficient level of clinical trial activity or we risk losing our brightest minds offshore and seeing research facilities close.

"There are a number of regulatory barriers that act like a handbrake on clinical trials that we hope the action group will be able to resolve.

"Compared to a number of other countries, in Australia there is a lack of coordination between the states for ethical approval of clinical trials, the time to get clinical trials established

is too long, and the methods for recruiting patients to clinical trials are outdated," Dr Shaw said.

Following the Federal Government's announcement of its Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Medicines Australia, Generic Medicines Industry Australia (GMiA) chairman Dr Martin Cross has warned the deal will damage the pharmaceutical industry in Australia.

"It's going to result in jobs, exports and manufacturing being affected and quite possibly curtailed," a spokesperson for Dr Cross told *Pharmacy eNews*.

The MoU will see the government save \$1.9 billion over five years on its drugs bill.

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Bringing sexy back for HSDD sufferers

THE NON-HORMONAL treatment flibanserin has been favoured as a clinical improvement for pre-menopausal women with hypoactive sexual desire disorder (HSDD), which may affect up to one in 10 Australian women.

HSDD, which is often misdiagnosed as a slow libido, results from an imbalance in the inhibitors and excitatory neurotransmitter system.

Research presented at The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (ACOG) annual clinical meeting showed that of 1,338 participants questioned in the pooled Phase III study, over 50 per cent of women reported feeling 'very much improved', 'much improved' or 'minimally improved' with flibanserin 100mg compared with placebo.

In the second part of the study, more than 50 per cent of 1,219 participants questioned reported a "meaningful benefit" from treatment with flibanserin compared with placebo, with

the treatment shown to increase sexual desire and reduce associated distress.

"We know that flibanserin is effective and well tolerated in a clinical setting, but it's important to understand too whether patients themselves see a benefit from treatment," said John Thorp, study investigator and Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of North Carolina Medical School.

"These study results are very encouraging – not only did women report an improvement in their HSDD symptoms, but they felt the improvement was meaningful to them and their overall well-being."

Paula Hall, a sexual and relationship psychotherapist from the UK, told the Congress that HSDD affects thousands of women, but is often overlooked.

"In both of these study analyses, we're seeing very positive outcomes with flibanserin, which is really quite exciting."

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BRIEFS

DRINKERS HEALTHIER

A Paris based health researcher has urged people to "stop using health arguments" to justify drinking despite evidence showing moderate drinkers are healthier than teetotallers.

A study on the link between alcohol consumption and cardiovascular health released last night revealed moderate drinkers enjoy better health than heavy drinkers or those who abstain.

However the study's lead author Boris Hansel from the Hopital de la Pitie in Paris said there was still on definitive link to prove alcohol improved cardiovascular health.

"There's too much talk about the benefits of moderate drinking... I am not saying that you shouldn't drink. But let's stop using health arguments to justify the consumption of alcohol.

"In any case, it is clearly premature to promote alcohol consumption as the basis of cardiovascular protection," he said.

VIC ALZHEIMERS RATE TO QUADRUPLE

Alzheimers Australia says Victoria needs to start planning for an

expected fourfold increase in the number of people suffering dementia over the next 40 years.

An Access Economics study commissioned by the organisation estimates the number of Victorian dementia sufferers will increase from about 66-thousand to 250-thousand in 2050.

The report says the huge increase will largely be driven by population growth and ageing baby boomers.

RARE BLOOD DISORDER

People with the rare blood disorder, Paroxysmal Nocturnal Haemoglobinuria (PNH), are being put at risk because funding for life-saving medication has not been allocated in the budget.

Professor Jeffrey Szer, director of the Department of Clinical Haematology and Bone Marrow Transplant Service at Royal Melbourne Hospital said the government's failure to provide funding for PNH treatment will undoubtedly cost lives.

"One-in-three people living with PNH will die within five years of diagnosis, if they do not have access to effective treatment," he said.

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