

Media release

Wednesday 2 March 2022

Hospital Pharmacists welcome PBS listing of Lagevrio, reiterate calls for safe and quality access

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has welcomed yesterday's announcement by the Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon. Greg Hunt MP on the listing of molnupiravir (Lagevrio) on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says the advent of oral COVID-19 treatments will reduce the likelihood of COVID-19-positive Australians requiring hospitalisation, easing the pressures on Australia's public hospital system.

'Just over a month ago, Australia reached a national peak of over 5,300 COVID-19 hospitalisations, putting immense strain on hospitals and our Hospital Pharmacist workforce, many of whom themselves were unwell with COVID-19 or under isolation orders.

'Hospital Pharmacists were again the first cohort of pharmacists to access innovative COVID-19 treatments such as molnupiravir (Lagevrio) and nirmatrelvir + ritonavir (Paxlovid) from the National Medical Stockpile in February, and we strongly commend the Government's decision to list molnupiravir (Lagevrio) on the PBS to ensure timely access to Australians in the community who would benefit most and reduce their hospitalisation risk.

'On the same day, SHPA was also proud to update our [Don't Rush to Crush](#) (4th edn.) Handbook with monographs for molnupiravir (Lagevrio) and nirmatrelvir + ritonavir (Paxlovid) to assist with their use for patients with swallowing difficulties, such as older Australians'

Ms Michaels reiterated calls to ensure these medicines are prescribed, supplied and administered in a safe and quality manner, given these treatments are very new with limited international experience, and doctors and pharmacists are still developing their understanding of the risks and benefits of these medicines.

'Over recent weeks, we have heard from Hospital Pharmacist members around the country that due to the lack of consistent, streamlined care models, timely access to molnupiravir (Lagevrio) as well as nirmatrelvir + ritonavir (Paxlovid) has been compromised, with a lack of appropriate nursing and pharmacy staff in aged care facilities resulting in COVID-19-positive patients being kept in hospitals longer than intended.

'The PBS listing of molnupiravir (Lagevrio) will go some way to ameliorate these issues to ensure pharmacist review in the community setting, however the lack of medicines information services led by specialist medicines information pharmacists available to primary care practitioners, means GPs and community pharmacists have no one to turn to if they require timely, tailored and expert advice on the appropriate supply of these new medicines to safely manage potential drug interactions.

‘Many Hospital Pharmacists and hospital doctors have access to specialist medicines information pharmacists within their hospital networks, which are integral to the safe prescribing and dispensing of complex medicines to complex patients, and SHPA strongly supports investment in similar services for our colleagues in the community.’

Over the last two years, Hospital Pharmacists across Australia have played a key role in the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting state and territory vaccination clinics to administer roughly a third of all COVID-19 vaccinations nationally.

‘As hospitals managed waves of Delta and Omicron over the last year, Hospital Pharmacists were accessing specialised infusible medicines such as remdesivir and sotrovimab from the National Medical Stockpile to treat hospitalised COVID-19 patients,’ says Ms Michaels.

‘This expert intervention helped greatly reduce the incidence of mortality, a critical aspect of the pandemic that has helped insulate Australia from the worst pain and suffering we’ve seen overseas.’

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About SHPA

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national, professional, for-purpose organisation for leading pharmacists and pharmacy technicians working across Australia’s health system, advocating for their pivotal role improving the safety and quality of medicines use. Embedded in multidisciplinary medical teams and equipped with exceptional medicines management expertise, SHPA members are progressive advocates for clinical excellence, committed to evidence-based practice and passionate about patient care.

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