

Media release

Tuesday 11 January 2022

Hospital workers need rapid tests to fight dangerous peak of Omicron wave

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has reiterated the urgent need for Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) to be made available to Hospital Pharmacists and their colleagues, as steeply rising numbers of positive COVID-19 cases and healthcare workers in isolation puts hospitals under intense pressure.

Today Victoria joined New South Wales in exceeding the highest number of COVID-19 hospitalisations since the previous pandemic peak during the 2021 Delta wave, due to a combination of relaxed restrictions and spread of the highly contagious Omicron variant.

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says ensuring frontline workers are working when healthy, and isolating when infected, is crucial to keeping hospitals running at maximum care capacity.

'SHPA members report that pharmacy departments are coping with the highest ever number of staff unable to work – in some cases up to 30% – due to being positive with COVID-19 or isolating as a close contact.

'Ensuring Hospital Pharmacists have greater access to RATs will help reduce reliance on the broad caution that can see staff at home when they are COVID-negative and available to work.'

Ms Michaels says moves to shore up supply of RATs are welcome and must be prioritised to maximise hospital capacity.

'Following recent announcements that a positive RAT result does not need confirmation via PCR test, we welcome the actions of state governments to bulk-purchase RATs for public sector workers and vulnerable populations; this supply and distribution effort must include Hospital Pharmacists, who continue to report a lack of access to tests.

'With a two-week lag anticipated from the peak in daily cases to peak in hospitalisations, we know a significant number of Australians will be in hospital with COVID-19 by the end of January.

'Our joint focus must be to ensure they receive the best possible care, which means protecting and preserving the health and energy of our essential hospital staff, ensuring Australians receive the hospital care they need, when they need it.'

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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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