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MEDIA RELEASE

Hep C roll-out a supply chain success story

Last year's roll-out of two new Hepatitis C drugs is being hailed as a shining example of the ability of Australia's pharmaceutical supply chain to deliver for government and patients.

The PBS listing of Sovladi (sofosbuvir) and Harvoni (ledipasvir/sofosbuvir) – life-saving medications that can cure Hepatitis C within the space of three months – in March 2016 resulted in a massive spike in the number of patients being treated for the disease, putting huge pressure on the supply chain to meet demand.

On average, 1,000 patients were treated for Hepatitis C each year in the 20 years prior to the PBS listing of Sovladi and Harvoni but, following their listing, more than 33,000 patients were treated in the space of 9 months, a demand well above forecasts.

National Pharmaceutical Services Association Chairman Mark Hooper said the rollout of Sovladi and Harvoni represented a transformational success in the battle against Hepatitis C.

“The PBS listing of these two life-saving medicines and subsequent timely treatment of an unprecedented number patients right across the country represents a quantum leap in the eradication of Hepatitis C in Australia,” Mr Hooper said.

“Thanks to a tremendous joint effort by government and the pharmaceutical industry, we were able to absorb and deal with numerous challenges, ultimately changing tens of thousands of lives across Australia.

“It is another example of the ability of the supply chain to support government health policy and deliver for Australian patients.”

Each patient treated with Sovladi and Harvoni requires three courses over a period of three months. At a cost of around \$20,000 per bottle, it is one of the more expensive medicines on the PBS.



Gilead Sciences Australia and New Zealand General Manager Rob Hetherington, manufacturer of the two drugs for the Australian market, said the PBAC approval led to a complex set of challenges.

“By their nature, medications that cure disease are different from other medicines in that the cost across the supply chain is borne quickly,” Mr Hetherington said.

“In the case of Sovladi and Harvoni, demand was beyond all expectations and this presented significant challenges in sustaining the supply and managing cashflow.

“Despite these significant challenges, the rollout was a triumph of collaboration between the PBAC, the Department of Health and the broader supply chain – all patients that were waiting to be treated were able to be treated,” he said.

The full-line pharmaceutical wholesalers worked closely with Gilead Sciences to ensure Australians had access to the medications via their community pharmacy.

“The CSO requirements meant we had to ensure that the entire supply chain worked collaboratively to enable the rapid rollout to pharmacies right across Australia given the very short turn-around from approval to distribution,” said Symbion Executive General Manager Pharmacy Brett Barons.

“Right across the supply chain, there was significant financial exposure associated with carrying relatively large quantities of such a high-value stock.

“A significant issue for CSO wholesalers was ensuring funding and risk exposure was properly managed so that we were able to successfully bring these two critical and high cost medicines to patients right across Australia in a timely manner,” he said.

The National Pharmaceutical Services Association represents CSO wholesalers Australian Pharmaceutical Industries, National Pharmacies, Sigma Healthcare and Symbion.

Contact: Donna Staunton on 0413 185 724 or Myles Wallace on 0432 866 094