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MEDIA RELEASE

***PharMIbridge* RCT training for pharmacists in regional Victoria**

Training for regional Victorian pharmacists involved in the Bridging the Gap between Physical and Mental Illness in Community Pharmacy (*PharMIbridge*) Randomised Control Trial (RCT) will be held in Melbourne on 8th & 9th February 2021.

The *PharMIbridge* RCT is a collaboration between The Pharmacy Guild of Australia, The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, Griffith University and The University of Sydney. The RCT is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health as part of the Sixth Community Pharmacy Agreement.

Professor Amanda Wheeler, from Griffith University, who is leading the trial said “The aim of *PharMIbridge* training is to increase the confidence of the pharmacist in supporting consumers with severe and persistent mental illness and to increase access to the number of *Mental Health Friendly Pharmacies* across Australia. We know that mental wellbeing has been really impacted for a lot of people in Victoria during the lockdown of 2020 and this is especially so for those living with a mental illness who are particularly vulnerable to isolation and loss of face-to-face interactions.”

The *PharMIbridge* RCT, involving up to 15 community pharmacies in regional Victoria, will test the effectiveness of an individualised, pharmacist-led support service (*PharMIbridge* intervention) for people living with severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI), compared to a standard in-pharmacy medication review service (MedsCheck).

The *PharMIbridge* intervention involves an in-depth medicine support service delivered over six-months that is goal-oriented, flexible, and individualised and aims to identify and address problems relating to psychotropic medication use or physical and psychological health concerns.

A MedsCheck involves a pharmacist reviewing a consumer’s medication to improve medication use and address any medication-related questions, with a report sent to and/or discussed with the consumer’s GP.

The National President of the Guild, George Tambassis, said the Guild’s commitment to *PharMIbridge* reflected the importance of researching the impact of an increasing role of community pharmacists in mental health.

“Pharmacists can be the first health professional a mental health consumer will turn to for help. This trial is an important initiative in determining the impact of a pharmacist’s intervention in helping people living with mental illness.”

The trial is assessing changes in consumer medication adherence and health outcomes, including quality of life, physical health, and mental wellbeing. It is also assessing the confidence and knowledge of community pharmacists to support consumers, as well as evaluating the acceptability and cost-effectiveness of the new service.

Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) National President, Associate Professor Chris Freeman, said as medicines experts, pharmacists play a vital role in the management of mental illness in the community.

“Medicines are an important component of treatment for people living with mental illness which is why pharmacists have an important role to play however that should not limit our role,” he said.

“Pharmacists work closely with patients to manage their conditions, often as a conduit to other services, an advocate for the person or to lend a compassionate ear and serve as a critical element in the healthcare team.”

The training workshop is followed by support from the Research Team over the nine months of trial implementation.

For more details email pharmibridge@griffith.edu.au or visit griffith.edu.au/pharmibridge or call (07) 3735 8038.