

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



David Brown

CEO, PDL

As pharmacists face a wave of challenges due to the pandemic, including legislative changes, David Brown tells *Retail Pharmacy* how the evolving insurance and risk management needs of the profession help shape the company's priorities.

David, please tell us a little about yourself and your experience in our sector.

I joined PDL at the beginning of 2017 to lead the organisation into the next phase of its long and distinguished history.

I'm thoroughly enjoying the role, and in particular having reconnected with the pharmacy profession I've worked so closely with for most of my career. I come from an insurance and risk management background with more than 30 years' experience in executive positions in both the private and public sector.

I'm probably best known in pharmacy circles for my time as general manager of Guild Insurance, a role I performed for around 20 years. In that time, the company grew rapidly and profitably through referral to become renowned as one of the top 20 global high-performing companies and won the Australian and New Zealand Institute of Insurance and Finance's coveted annual award for Risk Manager of the Year three times over.

From a professional indemnity point of view, what challenges has Covid-19 brought to the business?

Calls to our professional officers have increased drastically as members inquire about the many legislative changes that occurred to accommodate Covid-19 issues. Public anxiety and aggression caused by lockdown was directed at pharmacists who, in turn, required extra peer support from PDL.

Covid-19 has certainly been a contributing factor to an increase in notifications against members, as the regulations continued to evolve in each jurisdiction, with reports to PDL increasing by around 20 per cent year on year.

We've also been heavily involved in various professional and governmental working groups seeking to find ways to address the myriad risks and issues the

pandemic has presented for pharmacists in Australia. This has been across all facets of the profession, including hospital pharmacists and community pharmacy owners.

If legislation facilitates pharmacist vaccination of patients for Covid-19, will this have a major impact on the exposure of pharmacists and the fees pharmacist pay?

At the moment the situation is fairly fluid, so it's a little too early to state what the impact might be from an insurance exposure or pricing perspective.

The focus right now has been on working with government to resolve some of the uncertainties around indemnification, the nature of the vaccines and the risks involved, the compression of the testing approach, distribution issues and the like.

Hopefully, by the time this is published, there is clarity around these matters, and we can advise members accordingly. Suffice to say that insurance availability and premiums are linked to both historical and future anticipated claims costs. The millions of vaccines administered by pharmacists around Australia have not seen a significant rise in incidents or claims, with pricing remaining stable. Government support to mitigate the above uncertainties should see this continue.

Similarly, with increased scope of practice, for pharmacists how does this impact PDL?

Along with our board, PDL's professional officers are pharmacists, competent in ethics and abreast of pharmacy regulations. PDL is at the table every time the conversation moves to increasing the scope of pharmacy practice.

Not only do we aim to inform the profession of the risks involved and how they might be mitigated, but we also liaise with the insurer, Guild Insurance, to

ensure appropriate indemnity protection is in place.

Apart from Covid-19 testing and vaccination, and discussions around areas such as telepharmacy, minor ailments and other evolving pharmacy roles, a couple of the other emerging areas of focus for us currently are pharmacist prescribing, greater integration and possible expansion of role in aged care facilities, and opportunities to expand pharmacists' roles in general practice settings.

What are your business priorities in 2021?

The evolving insurance and risk management needs of the profession help shape our priorities. We're currently looking at pharmacy simulators, to add to our webinars and other emerging technology, as a means to encourage people to be more engaged in the risk management messages we deliver.

Our focus is on continuous learning, developing our people, growing the membership offering and making PDL even more accessible and easy to deal with. Some exciting new projects lie ahead to ensure we're maximising technology to connect with our members, without losing any of that personal touch for which we're renowned.

We analyse our incident reporting data, advising the profession of the most common or dangerous causes of errors, and create processes and procedures to aid pharmacists to avoid these situations in the future. Our focus on sharing this de-identified data for the benefit of the profession has grown exponentially in recent years and we've invested heavily in technology to enable that to continue to grow. As we continue our role as risk advisers to the profession, it's pleasing to see interest growing across the sector in relation to medication safety.