

VACCINE ROAD BUMPS

Shortage delays hostel staff jabs, with other dilemmas surfacing

WANGARATTA and district is continuing to work through phases 1a and 1b of the COVID-19 vaccination rollout, though high early demand for the AstraZeneca vaccine and supply shortages with Pfizer doses have created some road bumps.

Adrian Johnstone, chief executive officer at St Catherine's Hostel in Ryley Street, said 61 residents vaccinated on March 11 received their second jab on Thursday



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with no ill effects.

However, he said a shortage of the Pfizer vaccine in the lead-up to Easter meant only five of the 19 staff vaccinated in March were able to receive their follow-up dose.

Mr Johnstone told the Wangaratta Chronicle yesterday that he had sought advice from a

number of contacts in the meantime, but was still "none the wiser" about when the 14 other staff members would have their vaccinations completed, or of the protocol around vaccinating residents who had moved into the hostel since the first round.

"I understand that ideally, four to six weeks should be the most time between doses, and after that, 12 weeks is the most it should be," he said.

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ALL DONE: St Catherine's staff members Kara Jones and Hannah Beeby with resident Greg Hayes, who received his second Pfizer vaccination on Thursday.

PHOTO: Kieren Tilly

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"The concern is that the first vaccine will be null and void and we'll need to go through the process again, which is really disappointing.

"If that's the case, how much money is being wasted in lost doses, from an accountability point of view?

"Also, anyone who has come in since the first round is not vaccinated, and that's a dilemma as well - there doesn't seem to be a system in place for them.

"I just don't think it's good enough.

"My other genuine concern is that the community is so divided; people who are sitting on the fence about getting the vaccine may just say it's too hard and not worry about it.

"Another potential issue is the flu vaccine; there needs to be a two or three week gap between the flu and COVID-19 vaccines, and as we get closer to the flu season, there's going to be a bit of a domino effect with people who have received one not being able to get the other."

Mr Johnstone said he could

not understand, with the amount of documentation provided for each vaccination, why St Catherine's did not receive the same number of doses for the second round as the first.

"There was so much planning for the first round to happen, and it was amazing, but the second round was not so good," he said.

Mr Johnstone said it was hoped around 80 per cent of the hostel's 87-strong workforce would be vaccinated against COVID-19.

While local aged care residents have been among those to receive vaccinations in the first phase of the rollout, phase 1b is being assisted locally by the South Wangaratta Medical Centre and Phillipson Street Clinic.

Phillipson Street practice manager Deb Bridgfoot said the clinic had completed around 700 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine in just over two weeks, with the third session to be held on Friday.

"We hope to have 1100 done by then," she said.

"We haven't had any supply problems; the biggest issue is

being able to book people in."

Ms Bridgfoot said the clinic had been receiving 300 calls a day, since offering the vaccine from week one of the rollout.

She said while there was nothing to judge it on, demand had been well beyond expectations.

"We were smashed in those first 10 days and haven't been able to catch up," she said.

Ms Bridgfoot said it was pleasing to witness the number of people who saw the value in being vaccinated during the pandemic, and she encouraged people to be patient with the rollout.

Adrianna Raison, practice manager at South Wangaratta Medical Centre, said the clinic had administered 150 AstraZeneca vaccines since starting on March 29.

"There was quite a lot of phone traffic initially, and though it has died off a little, that may be because of the Easter break," she said.

Ms Raison said she hoped as more GP clinics were able to offer the vaccine, it would ease pressure and waiting times at others.