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COMMUNICATION KEY TO VACCINE CONFIDENCE

The AMA commends the Australian Government for listening to medical advice on the AstraZeneca vaccine and taking a more cautious approach to the rollout, with emerging evidence there is a very low risk of clotting associated with the vaccine.

“I want to emphasise the AstraZeneca vaccine for people who are 50 and over is considered very safe and the benefits vastly outweigh any risks,” AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said.

“The system has worked as it should. The expert advice has been given and the Government is acting in line with it.

“The clotting seen in few patients around the world is extremely rare, quite separate to normal thrombosis, and occurs at about 1 in 250,000.

“By comparison if you contract COVID-19 the risk of dying is much higher.

“This setback may slow down the vaccine rollout, but it also means the rollout is based on the best advice possible – it is not a race to the finish line.

“The AMA has always strongly insisted on decisions based on the best scientific advice made independently by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI).

“The job of the TGA and ATAGI is to look at the risks versus benefits and to advise on who should have the AstraZeneca vaccine, and those who should not, based on the situation in Australia where fortunately we have little to no community transmission of COVID-19.

“About 20 million Pfizer vaccines were expected to arrive in Australia between now and the end of the year and today the government has announced an order for another 20 million doses. The Government must continue to explore the availability of alternative vaccines.

“Those under 50 who qualify for the vaccine - such as those who have serious medical conditions - will still be able to have the AZ if they do not wish to wait for a Pfizer vaccine.

“Patients can talk to their trusted GP to get clear information on the risk of this unusual and very rare clotting disorder versus the benefits for them, so they can provide informed consent.

“The main aim now will be to properly convey this information to the community so that public confidence in the vaccine rollout is maintained,” Dr Khorshid said.

The AMA will also continue to work closely with the Government as it seeks to reset the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines following last night’s decision to preference the Pfizer vaccine for patients under 50 years of age.

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