

### Weekly Comment

Welcome to *Pharmacy Daily's* weekly comment feature, with a regular column from a pharmacy industry commentator.

This week's industry contributor is Blackmores naturopath Pam Stone.

### Complementary medicine—where's the evidence?

Practitioners of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) generally agree that evaluating natural remedies by the same criteria as orthodox medicines can be a flawed and limiting approach.

Researching a single herb or nutrient does not reflect how these ingredients are used in a clinical setting as part of a whole system approach where multiple therapeutic tools are used together.

In reality though evidence is needed if CAMs are to be accepted and prescribed widely by healthcare professionals.

In fact there is a substantial body of evidence covering the use of herbal medicines and nutrients for a wide range of conditions.

In addition, the low level of risk associated with these medicines has been highlighted and further validates their use as a part of effective patient care.

However research funding for CAMs in Australia is still inadequate, and there is a need for more quality studies to support its use.

In spite of this, there is impressive and growing research that does exist and it is important that this research is communicated for the overall benefit to patient health.

One event to note is the third Blackmores Research Symposium, to be held in Syd on 30 April and 01 May.

Here leading international and Australian researchers will explore nutrient and lifestyle strategies for conditions at different life-stages, presenting the latest advances in nutritional medicine and discussing the integration of these findings into clinical practice.

Details can be found at [blackmores.com.au/symposium](http://blackmores.com.au/symposium).

For an evidence-based online seminar on common CAMs used in pharmacy, with 4 PSA CPD points, go to [www.blackmoresmedical.com.au](http://www.blackmoresmedical.com.au).



Pam Stone is Blackmores Director of Education. Click here to register for Blackmores Online Education Program.

## Sigma now faces the ATO

**SIGMA** Pharmaceuticals' *Sigma Rewards* loyalty scheme is under investigation by the Australian Taxation Office, which uncovered possible problems during a routine audit of a Sigma pharmacy.

Today's *Financial Review* says the random audit revealed the "volume and value" of goods received by the pharmacy under the scheme, which under tax legislation must be counted under assessable income.

Electronic goods and holidays are available to the approximately 1500 pharmacy members of the scheme, and the probe means that they may now have a hefty additional tax bill to account for.

### Cardio deaths fall

**CARDIOVASCULAR** mortality rates have dropped significantly in the last 23 years, with the greatest declines in stroke and CHD death rates found amongst Australians aged between 55 and 74 years.

The statistics, drawn from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, also found that between 1987 and 2006, rates of cardiovascular disease including coronary heart disease, stroke, heart failure, rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease also slowed amongst women aged 45-50 years, and Australians aged between 35-54 years.

Cautiously optimistic in welcoming the results, AIHW's Anne Broadbent, of the Institute's Cardiovascular, Diabetes and Kidney Unit, said that CVD is still a leading cause of death in Australia, and that there "is no room for complacency with [the] results".

**MEANWHILE** Medicines Australia has welcomed the results, attributing the decline in CVD disease to new and improved medications.

"One of the key reasons that Australians are less likely to die from cardiovascular disease today compared with 1987 is the range of cardiovascular medicines that the pharmaceutical industry has brought to market over that time", said Medicines Australia ceo, Brendan Shaw.

"This is a classic example of how new technologies developed by the pharmaceutical industry have resulted in people living longer, healthier lives," Shaw added.

The rewards scheme is also the subject of the first complaint to be lodged under the new Generic Medicines Industry Association Code of Conduct (**PD** 13 Apr).

Melbourne academic Ken Harvey says Sigma Rewards breaches the code, but the company argued that the loyalty scheme, operated by its wholesale division, doesn't differentiate between products and thus doesn't give any incentive for a pharmacist to buy a particular brand.

### Caralluma approval

**THE** TGA has approved the use of 'Caralluma adscendens var. fimbriata' as a therapeutically active ingredient in listed medicines.

The TGA has approved Caralluma for use under specified conditions including that its preparation is derived from the dried aerial parts of Caralluma adscendens var. fimbriata only; and that the preparation is a hydroethanolic extract only.

### Pharmacy knockback

**THE** University of North Carolina in the USA has changed its mind about creating a new standalone school of pharmacy at its Greensboro campus.

The UNC Board of Governors said they had made the decision due to "uncertainty" in the pharmacy field, including the "increasing reliance on automation and robotics as a way to handle prescription volume and reduce costs".

They also cited "the uncertainty of the health care reimbursement system with regard to creating a revenue stream to compensate pharmacists for patient care services".

### RGH E-Bulletin

**THIS** week's edition of the Repatriation General Hospital Pharmacy E-Bulletin gives an overview of clinical applications of prostaglandins, including prostacyclin and thromboxanes.

Applications include treatment of hypertension, haemorrhage, induction of labour, erectile dysfunction, glaucoma and prevention of NSAID-induced ulcers.

The bulletin is available at [auspharmlist.net.au/ebulletin.php](http://auspharmlist.net.au/ebulletin.php).

### Corum repayment

**CORUM** Group has advised that it's paid \$375,000 to Westpac Banking Corporation, saying this is "in full satisfaction of the senior Debt Facility".

It's not clear how this reconciles with the \$468,750 outstanding balance notified two weeks ago (**PD** 01 Apr), but Corum also has a further \$4.3m payment due at the end of next month.

The company said the funds were "sourced from operations," and the update didn't give any further information on the status of its dispute with Westpac, which is also requesting a termination payment.

### PD winners

**CONGRATULATIONS** to Sarah Moss from Caringbah South Pharmacy, Kylie Harris from Chariot, Mary Emanuel from Australian Self-Medication Industry, Kirsten Bruce from Viva Communications and Vicki Hulands from The Pharmacy Guild of Australia who were the lucky winners of last week's *Pharmacy Daily* Pure Spa competition.

Be sure to check-out this week's brand new Cosmetic Bag competition featured on **page two!**

## BLACKMORES

### NEW ONLINE EDUCATION PROGRAM

For your chance to **WIN A \$25 MYER VOUCHER**

simply go to [www.education.blackmores.com.au](http://www.education.blackmores.com.au) and follow the prompts to complete Blackmores Nutritional Oils online module:

**Which Blackmores fish oil product contains double the omega-3s of standard fish oil?**

Send in your answer to [elarning@pharmacydaily.com.au](mailto:elarning@pharmacydaily.com.au)

The first 40 correct entries received will win!



**WIN!**

**12 FREE**  
Months  
Standard Membership!

Offer ends March 31. ACT NOW!  
Click here for more information  
DAVID PATTON: 0432 515 717

Chemsave

**7.5% PBS  
DISCOUNT!**  
COST **-0.5%**

## Emergency OK

THE Australasian College of Emergency Medicine has downplayed suggestions in today's *Daily Telegraph* that emergency departments are swamped by patients with non-urgent conditions who could be seen by a GP.

NSW college chair, Dr Richard Paoloni, described the suggestion as a "myth" which has resurfaced as governments discuss the National Health Reform package.

He said it's an "ambit claim" from the NSW government seeking extra funding for emergency services which the state has been paying for because of allegedly underfunded general practice.

"The few GP type patients are treated rapidly - they don't block beds, don't delay ambulances and require very little medical or nursing resource," he said.

Paoloni said that NSW Health had sought "almost no clinician advice" regarding the National Health Reform proposals.

## Voltaren Gel is misleading?

THE US Food and Drug Administration has issued a warning letter to Novartis Consumer Health, regarding what it sees as "false or misleading" direct-to-consumer Voltaren Gel information.

According to the FDA, Novartis' direct-to-consumer Voltaren Gel promotional materials breached several statutes in the US Food and Drug Act, by overstating the product's efficacy and also by minimising "serious risks" associated with Voltaren's usage.

The direct to consumer email in question claimed that Voltaren Gel "[keeps] joint pain from interrupting your days ahead" and "[keeps you] living life with less painful interruptions".

The FDA took umbrage at the claims, saying they imply that Voltaren Gel has been proven to have a "direct, positive, and broad impact on a patient's activities of daily living by reducing or eliminating daily interruptions due

to joint pain".

The "FDA is not aware of substantial evidence or substantial clinical experience demonstrating that using Voltaren Gel results in an overall positive impact on the general activities of daily living as suggested," the agency said.

The FDA also found Novartis' claims that Voltaren provides "targeted relief" were misleading because it suggested that Voltaren may be useful on any type of joint pain, whereas in fact it has only been FDA indicated for "relief of the pain of osteoarthritis of joints amenable to topical treatment, such as the knees and those of the hands".

Novartis also received a warning over the minimisation of usage risks because the risks were presented "in extremely small black font, and in [difficult to read] single-spaced paragraph format" and in "complex medical terminology".

The FDA has now ordered Novartis to cease the distribution of all of the offending promotional materials, and has also requested a written response as to whether the company will comply, and exactly which other promotional materials contain the same "misleading" and "false" information.

## Carbs bad for hearts

A RECENT eight year study, conducted by Italy's National Cancer Institute has linked the consumption of carbohydrates from high-glycemic index foods with an increased risk of heart disease in women.

The study looked at 15,171 men and 32,578 women and found double the rate of heart disease in women who had diets rich in high GI carbs.

"A high consumption of carbohydrates from high-glycemic index foods, rather than the overall quantity of carbohydrates consumed, appears to influence the influence of developing coronary heart disease," the report said.

Researchers have also speculated that the female-only finding may have something to do with the fact that male androgen hormones slow the transformation of carbs into blood sugar, whereas oestrogen speeds this process up.



## DISPENSARY CORNER

A MINUTE on your lips, a lifetime on your hips!

A local Victorian cafe has responded to the recent locust swarms by taking the unusual step of offering its customers locust topped pizzas.

Locals, fed up with the plague which has dogged them since Easter, have also raised the possibility of locust biscuits, and even locusts dipped in chocolate.

Local chef Stefano de Perihis even reported requests for locust bisque!

Made-up of 60% protein, locusts however, may not actually be the healthiest eating option, as their one-tenth fat content far outweighs McDonald's fries.

THE price of education...

According to the oldest library in America, George Washington owes some fairly hefty overdue fines having checked two books out on 5 Oct 1789, and never returned them.

The late books, 'Law of Nations' and a volume of transcripts from the British House of Commons, have accrued around US\$300,000 in fines, however New York Society Library has said that it will waive the fine, but would like the books returned!

WHAT'S a bit of poison between friends?

IN a bid to break a world record, UK citizen Dave Jones, is embarking on a mammoth four month stint co-habiting a room with forty of the world's most venomous snakes.

"I wanted to challenge myself, and i also wanted to raise some money for charity," Jones told Sky News reporters.

Dave's four month flatmates are set to include the black mamba and the boomslang snake.

The previous record holder, 'Mad Martin', is a qualified snake handler who spent 113 days with deadly snakes.

But Jones isn't a snake expert, and confided in reporters that he fully expects to have to move snakes out of his bed, shower, and cupboards during his slithery co-habitation.

## WIN A STYLISH COSMETIC BAG



Every day this week, **Pharmacy Daily** is giving readers the chance to win a stylish cosmetic bag, courtesy of Total Beauty Network.

Exclusive to Designer Brands is a wide range of cosmetic bags, for both

men and women. All of the bags are fully lined and made from durable fabrics.

With a variety of colours, shapes and sizes from bright to tame for young and old there is something to suit everyone's needs and taste.

For your chance to win one of these stylish cosmetic bags this week, simply send through the correct answer to the daily question below:

**How many different styles of bags is in the range?**

Send entry to: [comp@pharmacydaily.com.au](mailto:comp@pharmacydaily.com.au)

The first correct entry received each day will win.

Hint! Visit [www.tbn.com.au](http://www.tbn.com.au).