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New herbal guide

TODAY'S edition of Pharmacy Daily includes two full pages of news, plus a full page on the third edition of the popular natural medicines compendium titled, Herbs and Natural Supplements: An Evidence Based Guide, which has just been released - see page 3.

PSA on pain patients

MORE than one million Australians are currently living with pain each day, according to the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia.

In addition, the PSA totes figures which show that between 20-20 percent of the population may be experiencing chronic pain.

Part of the PSA's bid to get pharmacists to attend its advanced clinical session on pain, led by Dr Lisa Nissen (Associate Professor in the University of Queensland, School of Pharmacy) at PAC10, the comments also plead the case that that pain is one of the most common reasons for a patient to seek medical care.

"We must as health professionals always look at pain within the context of this biopsychosocial model and consider how we, as pharmacists can contribute to the quality use of medicines for these patients," said Nissen.

"This presentation will outline some of the main principles involved in the management of pain and the types and combinations of drug therapy that are often used to treat this sometimes complex condition and more particularly, how pharmacists can play a pivotal role in the management of these often complex patients," she added.

For info see www.pac10.com.au.

Sigma warns of more red ink

SIGMA Pharmaceuticals today alerted investors that it expects to have to write down the value of its Pharmaceuticals Division by up to \$270 million when it announces its first half results later in the month (PD breaking news).

The company said that even though it only has a non-binding agreement with South African firm Aspen Pharmacare for the sale of the division, the indicative price of \$900 million means that Sigma must account for the much lower valuation of the business than previously estimated.

In July Sigma announced that it expected to make between \$190 and \$200m profit, and this latest \$270m deficit is likely to draw the struggling pharmaceutical manufacturer back into the red.

"Under the relevant accounting standards Sigma is required to review the carrying value of its relevant cash generating units, which includes the Pharmaceuticals Division," the company said.

The writedown will come despite not reaching final agreement with Aspen, with the deal for sale still under negotiation and subject to formal documentation, with the only agreement being that Sigma will exclusively deal with Aspen until 15 October.

Sigma said it intends to release its half year financial statements on 29 September, with today's announcement following discussions with its auditors as to the timing of recognition of the accounting implications of the sale.

"This will have a material impact on Sigma's full year results," the company said, adding that this in turn was likely to trigger the 'net

asset covenant' under its syndicated banking facility.

"Sigma has been in ongoing discussions with its lenders about the sale and the prospect of this adjustment, and continues to work constructively with them in relation to the provision of the relevant waivers required," the company said, adding that it intends to use part of the proceeds of the sale to significantly reduce its debt.

Sigma's board said it was "determined to accept the Aspen proposal to secure the Company's funding position into the future".

The move follows the March bloodbath at Sigma after it wrote off the carrying value of its generics business by \$424 million, leading to the eventual resignation of long-time ceo Elmo de Alwis and pending threats of a class action from investors.

Asthma information

THE National Asthma Council Australia has updated its information paper titled:

Leukotriene receptor antagonists in the management of childhood asthma to reflect the latest clinical evidence, drug therapies and physiological data.

Last updated in 2007, the paper discusses the role of Leukotriene receptor antagonists (LTRAs), including montelukast, in the treatment of children aged between two and 14 years suffering from mild persistent asthma, intermittent asthma, exercise-induced asthma and/or allergic rhinitis.

The updated paper will be distributed to GPs and pharmacists over the next few months, and is also available online at www.nationalasthma.org.au.

FDA rejects cough medicine restrictions

THE US Drug Safety and Risk Management Advisory Committee for the US Food and Drug Administration has voted against restrictions up for consideration regarding the common over-the-counter cough medicine ingredient, dextromethorphan (DMX).

Tasked with evaluating the potential for DMX abuse and the pharmaceutical industry's ability to prevent and police such occurrences, the committee concluded that there was not enough risk to warrant that there was not enough risk to warrant placing the drug under the Controlled Substances Act.

For the most part, the FDA will follow the Committee's advice, meaning that the majority of cough medicines sold in the US will stay available through supermarkets.

Had the Committee voted to reschedule the drug, it would have fallen under category V (pharmacy only), meaning Americans would have had to get the majority of their cough medicines from pharmacies.

Evidence presented to the Committee included figures which showed an increase of 72% in the last four years of the number of hospitalisations due to DMX abuse, with 8000 people having to seek emergency treatment.

The US Consumer Healthcare Products Association however argued that many teenagers considered DMX a "lousy high" and that it was using this impression as part of its own strategy to discourage abuse.

The Association did however ask the FDA to introduce tighter controls on the bulk sale of DMX, and also to introduce age restrictions, limiting the sale of DMX cough products to patients over 18 years old.

"The greatest potential [for preventing abuse] is in age limits," said one US Drug Safety and Risk Management Advisory Committee panelist, Professor Leslie Hendeles.

The FDA enquiry into the US use of dextromethorphan heard evidence that restricting its availability was likely to burden the US health system with add an additional four million visits to general practitioners a year.



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New learning program

A NEW online smoking cessation program (sponsored by Pfizer), titled 'Smoking Conversations', is now available for pharmacists free of charge to help them in dealing with and supporting customers wanting to quit cigarettes for good.

The launch comes on the back of the recent 25% hike in cigarette taxes, which has encouraged many Aussie smokers to consider quitting.

The four module education program covers topics including the impact of smoking, the science of addiction, the signs and symptoms of withdrawal, as well as the latest info on the main types of pharmacotherapy available including nicotine replacement therapy, bupropion and varenicline.

Other topics canvassed include the benefits of quitting, ways in which pharmacists can help patients get started quitting, how to advise patients on strategies to manage cue extinguishment and withdrawal, plus barriers to smoking cessation.

Also included in the Smoking Conversations tool are role play and expert opinion videos.

To register for the program go to www.e-pharmlearning.com.au.

Guild's single source

THE Pharmacy Guild of Australia has published 'The Fourth Community Pharmacy Agreement Research and Development Program: Overview and Findings'.

The publication is a complete one stop shop for information on the R&D program, as it provides an overview of the program (incl a brief history and summary of the research findings of the 24 projects funded under its banner) and also draws together the outcomes of the Fourth Agreement pharmacy practice research.

"In this publication, we now have all of the outcomes of this crucial program in one place," said Guild president Kos Sclavos.

"Having this valuable information compiled into a single, handy resource, really reinforces the value of this information and the importance of R&D in making Australia an international leader in the field of community pharmacy," he added.

Full versions of the project reports can be seen at www.guild.org.au/research.

Harvey slams CM report

LA TROBE University's Ken Harvey has hit back at comments made by the Australian Self-Medication Industry's Deon Schoombie (PD Tue) over the report into the cost effectiveness of complementary medicines, saying that the ASMI director "conveniently skipped over" several points.

Addressing the report's claim that acupuncture as a complement to standard care resulted in better pain outcomes, Harvey pointed out that the effect was only seen for a short period, with "no statistically significant benefit of acupuncture...found when all patients received standard care, implying that the benefit observed was probably a placebo effect."

In rebutting the report's fish oil claims Harvey said that although the use of fish oil supplements was shown to be a cost effective cardiovascular mortality preventer among people who had had a heart attack within three months, "no evidence was presented as to the cost-effectiveness of people without CHD taking fish oil for

'heart health' in the hope of preventing disease - where much promotion and use occurs with no good supportive data".

Harvey also said the literature review of osteoarthritis treatment Phytolodor, was "relatively sparse".

And finally when addressing the potential healthcare saving of using St John's wort over standard anti-depressants Harvey argued that many products containing the herb were not standardised or assessed for clinical efficacy by the TGA, with "variable" levels of active components.

Harvey also said that the multiple interactions between St John's wort and many other drugs highlight the need for supervision of patients using the supplement.

He concluded that while the report notes says complementary medicines could replace some conventional drugs, "this potential will only be realised if a higher regulatory standard can be applied to separate out products that have clinical evidence of effectiveness from the rest".

WIN AN AROMABABY ORGANIC PACK



Every day this week, *Pharmacy Daily* is giving readers the chance to win a pack filled with organic treats valued at \$58 rrp, courtesy of leaders in luxe mother & baby care, Aromababy.

Win one of 5 Organic Aromabath Powders, enriched with soothing oats and soy. Ideal for a super-milky bath yet without any dairy/milk content. Added pure essential oils help you dream away your worries as you soak.

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For a chance to win this great organic pack, simply send through the correct answer to the daily question below:

Back on Track is the name of a product for who?

Email your answer to: comp@pharmacydaily.com.au

The first correct entry received will win!

Hint: Visit: www.aromababy.com

Congratulations to yesterday's lucky winner: Jae Yeo from Medicare Australia. The correct answer was: yes.



DISPENSARY CORNER

OUCH!

A 65-year old American man, Lamar La Craze, has miraculously survived a 1200-strong sting attack from a swarm of bees as he mowed his lawn last month.

According to reports the bees set upon Lamar suddenly, rendering him unable to call out to his wife or to escape.

Lamar was not discovered until later in the day when his son found him slumped over a fence motionless.

"He was not moving, Lamar's son told the media.

"When I went to pull him out he looked up. His head was black, solid bees...it looked like a bee hive on his head," he added.

Rushed to the emergency room, medics counted 1200 stingers stuck into his face and body, with doctors also extricating dead bees from inside his ears, mouth, nose and throat.

Covered with black and blue reminders of his encounter, Lamar is now expected to make a full recovery.

A WEE discovery.

A retail group in New Zealand has been discovered selling fake urine to people who are hoping to beat drug tests in the workplace.

The mixture is comprised of chemicals similar in make up to that of human urine, and is heralded to have a "100% pass rate in New Zealand drug tests".

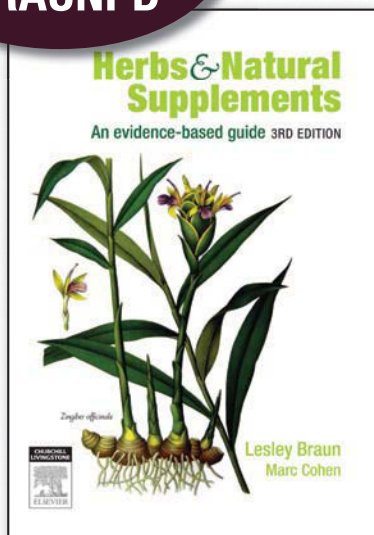
Owner of the Hempstore shop, Chris Fowlie, has argued that the product redresses what he considers are "violations against the bill of rights and the privacy act, which allow employers to conduct random drug tests."

The fake urine comes with its own special heating pad to warm it to body temperature, as well as a pouring spout which allows users to mimick the sound of urination in case the user is forced to take the test under watchful eyes.

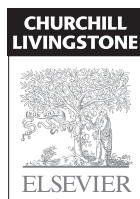
"With a bit of practice the pouring spout makes it look very realistic," said Fowlie.

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“Recommended evidence-based reference on Complementary Medicines”
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Herbs & Natural Supplements

An evidence-based guide 3RD EDITION

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Herbs and Natural Supplements: An Evidence-Based Guide 3e presents evidence-based information on the 130 most popular herbs, nutrients and food supplements used across Australia and New Zealand. Organised alphabetically by common name, each herb or nutrient listed includes information such as daily intake, main actions/indications, adverse reactions, contraindications and precautions, safety in pregnancy, and more. The new edition has been expanded with 2 new chapters (Pregnancy and Wellness) and 10 additional monographs (Arginine, Dunaliella, Elder, Goji, Pelargonium, Prebiotics, Red Yeast Rice, Rhodiola, Shatavari and Taurine).

This book was identified as “high quality” (Tier 2) in the NPS *Review of the Quality of Complementary Medicines Information Resources Report*, released March 2009.

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