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US Erbitux approval

THE US Food and Drug Authority has approved Erbitux (cetuximab) for use with chemotherapy to treat patients with late-stage (metastatic) head and neck cancer. See www.fda.gov.

Hobart Medicines Mgt

LAST minute registration for the 37th Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia National Conference, Medicines Management 2011, is still open.

Taking place in Hobart this week the main conference program runs 11-12 November.

SHPA has said it is expecting around 850 delegates to descend on Hobart for a scientific program which includes five international speakers, 80 contributed papers, 200 posters and an exhibition. See www.mm2011shpa.com.

Plenadren orphaned

THE European Commission has granted a European Marketing Authorisation for Plenadren (hydrocortisone, modified release tablet), an orphan drug for treatment of adrenal insufficiency in adults.

Produced by the Swedish specialty pharma company, DuoCort Pharma, the drug is a once daily oral tablet which works as a dual release hydrocortisone replacement therapy designed to better mimic the normal physiological cortisol profile in order to improve outcomes for patients suffering from adrenal insufficiency.

NSAIDs under fire, again

A RECENT article in *The Medical Journal of Australia* has once again ignited debate over the safety profile of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

The article titled *Stroke risk and NSAIDs: an Australian population-based study*, looked at the risk of stroke associated with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug use, and found that patients prescribed with NSAIDs saw an associated increased risk of stroke.

The study looked at 162,065 Australian veterans with incident dispensing of an NSAID between 01 Jan 2001 and 31 Dec 2008 and their rates of hospitalisation for stroke, ischaemic stroke or haemorrhagic stroke.

According to the study the incident use of NSAIDs was associated with a 1.88 times increased risk of hospitalisation for stroke (ischaemic or haemorrhagic) following first ever dispensing of an NSAID.

"Increased awareness of the potential for serious adverse cardiovascular events, together with individual assessment of cardiovascular risk, careful deliberation of the balance between risk and benefits and appropriate supervision, is required when initiating NSAID therapy," the authors said.

Aiming to alleviate concerns over Voltaren, Novartis issued a statement saying diclofenac therapies were not assessed in the study and that it is confident about the safety profile of the drugs. "Voltaren (diclofenac)

medications are available worldwide and have been used by millions of patients for more than 30 years, making it one of the world's most widely-used pain relieving and anti-inflammatory medicines," the company said.

"Medical evaluation of postmarketing data has not identified any new cardiovascular safety trend...The data reported in the Caughey study is in line with the known cardiovascular safety profile," the statement added.

In relation to the study itself Novartis was quick to point out that the authors stated "the analysis is associative only and does not prove causality".

MEANWHILE ASMI has also joined the chorus of NSAID defence, saying that current label warnings and existing advice regarding the non-prescription use of NSAIDs remains sound.

"This study did not examine lower non-prescription doses or over-the-counter (OTC) use of NSAIDs, and was conducted in a very specific study population," said ASMI Regulatory and Scientific Affairs Director, Steven Scarff.

"Many of the veterans studied suffer from a range of medical conditions and will, on average, be prescribed 11 unique medicines in a year," Scarff added.

In addition, Scarff added that whilst the authors were unable to examine the OTC use of NSAIDs, they found no association between ibuprofen use and an increased risk of stroke in this specific population.

Cancer development

PLANS for the billion dollar Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre have now been approved and will see the inclusion of 160 multi-day beds and a 42-bed critical care unit in the project.

The Centre will also feature 110 same day beds, a 24 bed clinical trial unit, 8 Medihotel suites, 8 operating theatres and radiation oncology bunkers.

The centre is an alliance between a number of major Vic hospitals as well as the University of Melbourne.

Cancer Hep B risk

US researchers have found that only 20% of patients with newly diagnosed cancer who had hepatitis B virus (HBV) risk factors were screened for HBV infection before starting chemotherapy.

The study looked at the records of 70,737 patients, and found the amount of HBV screening to be "inadequate", given that it is common for chemotherapy to reactivate the hepatitis B virus.

According to the study, reactivation may have occurred in nearly 25% of all patients, however it could have been prevented with screening and antiviral prophylaxis prior to the onset of chemo.

"For medical providers to practice effective screening, data-driven policies and strong collaboration among oncology and hepatology communities are essential," said study head, Dr Jessica Wang.

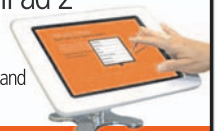


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Guild Update

This week's update from the Pharmacy Guild 5PCA agreement

Eligibility for rural programs funded under the Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement (5CPA) is about to change to ensure the programs continue to strengthen and support the rural pharmacy workforce.

Under the changes, only pharmacies located in PHARIA 2-6 will be eligible.

Previously some regional PHARIA 1 locations were deemed eligible. PHARIA refers to the Pharmacy Access/Remoteness Index of Australia. PHARIA 1 locations are areas that are considered to have high access to community pharmacy services.

Some PHARIA 1 locations were included in the rural programs because of historical workforce factors, including pharmacist shortages and lack of proximity to pharmacy schools.

The changes have been made following consultation between the Guild and the Department of Health and Ageing.

They recognise changes in the pharmacy landscape since the programs were first introduced more than 10 years ago.

The programs that will be affected include:

- Rural Pharmacy Continuing Professional Education Allowance
- Rural Pharmacy Scholarship Scheme
- Intern Incentive Allowance for Rural Pharmacies – formerly the Rural Pharmacists Pre-registration Incentive Allowance
- Rural Pharmacy Student Placement Allowance

The changes are being made to ensure alignment with the policy intent of the rural programs funded under 5CPA, and to make the best use of limited funding.

Copies of the approved Program Specific Guidelines will be available on www.ruralpharmacy.com.au shortly.



The Pharmacy Guild of Australia

Pharmacy new year Grants

APPLICATIONS are being sought for the Pharmacy Research Trust of NSW's 2012 grants program.

The grants are designed to foster, develop and assist the pursuit of research and post-graduate education and study in all branches of pharmacy.

Research undertaken with the grants must however be related to the causes, prevention or cure of disease in human beings, animals or plants.

The Trust has said it will consider applications for research project grants from established investigators which may include requests for research maintenance/personnel or scholarships for postgraduate

students.

Applications are also being sought for seed funding from less established researchers, usually of fewer than three years' standing, or for support of established investigators in exceptional circumstances.

All research projects and seed funding, other than for postgraduate students, will have a maximum duration of two years, whilst post-grad scholarships will have a duration of three years (PhD) or two years (Masters), with a possible extension of six months in the case of PhD scholarships.

Applications will be considered on the basis of the overall quality of the project and applicant, the worthwhile nature of the research, and the likelihood that it will be completed in the stated timeframe.

Applications are due to close on 09 December 2011.

For details visit the PSA website at www.psa.org.au.

Friday's PD winner

PHARMACY Daily would like to congratulate April Pearce from Ayr District Hospital who was the lucky winner of last Friday's Le Tan competition.

WIN A HOLLYWOOD FASHION TAPE

Hollywood Fashion Tape® is the original, registered trademarked, double-stick tape women use to keep clothing, shoes, and accessories in place. It's specially formulated adhesive is gentle on skin, hypoallergenic and leaves no residue on fabrics.

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To win, simply be one of the first three readers to send in the correct answer to the question below:

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Congratulations to yesterday's lucky winners, **Sam Bonaccorso** from **The Pharmacy Guild of Australia**, **Meme Phung** of **Yousave Chemist Macquarie** and **Nicole Vizard** of **Forbes Hospital**.

DISPENSARY CORNER

SERIOUS protein craving.

Two US men have been arrested for stealing a meatball sandwich off a 13 year old boy.

The men stopped the teenager at gunpoint and ordered him to empty his pockets.

After laying his mobile phone on the ground it seems the duo had a powerful carnivorous urge and left the valuables - but not before snatching the half eaten homemade sandwich and taking off.

The gun and the sandwich were recovered by police shortly after, but it is not known if the latter was returned to its rightful owner.

BRUSH with mortality.

A Swiss man is counting his lucky stars after a narrow miss with death, when a derailed tram slammed into his house.

The man was just about to walk his dog when he looked up to see the tram careening towards him.

With only seconds to spare the man and his dog bolted out of the way to watch the tram collide with a row of houses.



YOU mean you didn't want to look like a cat?

Leading US plastic surgeon, Dr Francis Palmer, is warning consumers that the "beauty" dream may, in a lot of cases, be a myth when it comes to facial procedures.

According to Palmer public spending on aesthetic medical procedures is between US\$30-\$40 billion per annum, around a third of which is spent on procedures which make people look "less attractive, unnatural and in some cases, even disfigured".

"Sadly, for the consumer looking to improve their appearance, it's like the wild, wild, west out there," he said.