



TGA seminars

THE Therapeutic Goods Administration has announced a number of public information sessions to provide details on the proposed new streamlined submission process for prescription medicines.

The seminars will be held in Melbourne on 17 February, Sydney on 24 February and Brisbane on 26 February, with registration forms now online at www.tga.gov.au.

Non-drug insomnia options

THE National Prescribing Service is advising that non-drug therapies be used as the first line treatment for insomnia, with the launch of a new 'Management Options to maximise sleep' education program.

It encourages health professionals to discuss the importance of good sleep practices and the potential harms of hypnotic medicines with patients.

The NPS cited data which showed that medication was prescribed for 95.2% of insomnia problems - even though US research has shown non-drug therapies have comparable effectiveness.

"As well as addressing insomnia, identifying and addressing the cause may eliminate the need for hypnotics," said NPS senior clinical adviser, Judith Mackson.

The NPS is also advising that a discontinuing hypnotic medicines should be trialled in patients who have been using them for long periods, and that behavioural and cognitive therapies should be offered.

UK NRT change

BRITAIN'S Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has announced an extended indication for Nicotine Replacement Therapy to include harm reduction, which has been granted for an NRT inhalator.

The MHRA said the change "reflects the fact that it has become widely accepted that there are no circumstances in which it is safer to smoke than to use NRT."

A public consultation has also been launched in the UK to look at whether other unlicensed nicotine products such as electronic cigarettes should or could be brought into regulation.

Support the big swim!



TWO middle-aged pharmacy executives in Speedos - the mind boggles!

But it's all in a good cause, with Andrew Vidler, general manager of Retail Services at Symbion Pharmacy, and Terry White Chemists National Brand Development Manager Chris Swifte set to take to the water, tackling the 20km stretch of ocean between Perth's Cottesloe Beach and Rottnest Island.

The 'Our Big Swim' adventure will happen on 20 Feb, where the pair are aiming to raise \$100,000 for three charities: Young Care, the Prostate Cancer Foundation and the Bowel Cancer & Digestive Research Institute Australia.

"In recent times, both Swifte and I have lost friends and male business colleagues affected by men's health issues, particularly bowel and prostate cancer," Vidler said.

In the 20km swim each duo needs a boat, crew and a paddler to accompany them across the channel, with the trip taking around seven gruelling hours to complete.

Symbion Pharmacy Services, Terry White, Apotex and Medibank have already pledged their support for the gutsy effort, with donations around \$30,000 so far - but much more is needed from the pharmacy industry.

"We have had plenty of offers of money for us to keep our clothes on, but the 'Cott to Rott' is strictly a no wetsuit event," Swifte said.

"We're asking all our friends, suppliers and customers in the industry to get behind us...we need the incentive to distract us from the sharks," he added.

To make a donation to this extremely worthy cause visit www.ourbigswim.com.

WIN A PURE SPA PACK



Congratulations to Dimity McDouall from Gold Cross who was yesterday's lucky winner of an All Pure Spa® baby pack.

Pharmacy Daily is giving readers the chance to win an All Pure Spa® baby pack every day this week, courtesy of Aromababy.

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PBS subscriptions

THE Health Department is inviting consumers to receive email notifications of news updates relating to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

The items include pricing information, PBS updates and the release of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee agenda for consumer comments.

The sign-up form is online at www.pbs.gov.au.

FDA Xiaflex approval

THE US Food and Drug Administration has announced the approval of Xiaflex (collagenase clostridium histolyticum) as the first drug to treat a progressive hand disease called Dupuytren's contracture, which can affect a person's ability to straighten and properly use their fingers.

Xiaflex is a biologic drug which works by breaking down collagen, and gives an alternative to surgery.

The FDA has also reported that a rare, but serious liver disorder called non-cirrhotic portal hypertension has been reported in some HIV patients taking Videx.

Call for Hydroxycut to be cut

A FORMAL complaint has been submitted to the Therapeutic Goods Advertising Committee about Hydroxycut (PD this week) calling for corrective advertising and a recall by the TGA.

The products have already been withdrawn in the USA, Canada, UK and Ireland, and in the light of the recent case report of hepatotoxicity associated with the Australian range of the product, Ken Harvey from Latrobe University is calling for their withdrawal in Australia.

Buscopan needed!

BOEHRINGER Ingelheim is sponsoring a world record attempt in Sydney's Martin Place next Mon, in which Aussie street performer The Space Cowboy will attempt to swallow 18 swords simultaneously.

The stunt will take place live in front of a crowd from around 7.45am, and will also include a warm-up act, with the event appropriately sponsored by Buscopan and Buscopan Forte, for the specialised relief of stomach aches and cramps.

"I believe that the continued promotion and marketing of these products in Australia constitutes a potentially life-threatening of serious risk to health," he said.

"A risk-benefit analysis would conclude that these products have little or no benefit," he added.

However an email sent from the TGA yesterday to Harvey notes that "one suspected adverse event does not necessarily mean that a health care risk exists".

When Hydroxycut was withdrawn in the UK, the Food Standards Agency said it had taken a precautionary approach, "as the specific problematic ingredient has not been highlighted and the UK formula shares common ingredients to the UK version."

Alcohol guidelines

THE Health Department has announced the release of two new sets of guidelines to help health professionals better treat people with alcohol abuse problems, as well as those with coexisting alcohol and other drug use and mental health conditions.

One of the documents was produced by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of NSW, aiming to provide up-to-date evidence-based information on the management of co-morbid drug and alcohol and mental health problems.

"More than one in three individuals with an alcohol and other drug use disorder has at least one co-occurring affective or anxiety disorder," said senior lecturer at the Centre, Dr Katherine Mills.

"The guidelines aim to increase AOD [alcohol and other drug] workers' knowledge and awareness of mental health issues and improve their ability to identify such conditions," she said.

The Sydney South-West Area Health Service in conjunction with the University of Sydney has also developed the updated *Guidelines for the Treatment of Alcohol Problems* which shows clinicians how to help patients reduce their drinking, as well as how to reduce alcohol-related harm to themselves and others.

See www.alcohol.gov.au.



DISPENSARY CORNER

HEALTH authorities in Austria are under fire for telling paramedics not to treat foreign tourists without prepayment.

The issue was highlighted last week by a German tourist who injured himself while skiing in the Alps near Innsbruck.

"During the ambulance ride, the crew started pushing buttons and then they said 'Sorry, but we have to charge you 230 euros now,'" said the holidaymaker.

"They were obviously very embarrassed," he added.

Officials defended the move, saying it was often hard to track down payment from foreign tourists once they left the area.

Most ambulances in Austria are now equipped with a machine to take credit card payments on the spot, they said.

AND speaking of paramedics, two ambulance drivers in South Africa have been arrested after filling their vehicle with stolen copper cables and attempting to speed off using their emergency lights and siren.

The two men worked for the health department in the eastern Mpumalanga province, and were allegedly wearing their uniforms when police arrested them near the mine where the theft occurred.

"Loads of copper cables to the value of 57,000 rand [\$8500] were stashed inside the vehicle," said a police spokesman.

"When they finished with their loot they then drove out of the premises with the emergency lights on, as if they were ferrying a patient in need of urgent medical attention," he added.

LET'S hope this type of robbery doesn't come to Australian community pharmacies.

A thief in South Korea has been arrested after allegedly robbing four convenience stores over the last four months.

His cunning way of stopping staff from chasing him was ordering the victims at knifepoint to strip down to their underwear, before making his escape.

Travel Specials

WELCOME to *Pharmacy Daily's* travel feature.

Each week we highlight a couple of great travel deals which we're sure will be of interest to everyone in the pharmacy industry.

INTREPID TRAVEL is offering a 20% discount on a 14-day trip to Japan, which is now priced at \$2800 for a 16 March departure.

The *Land of the Rising Sun* adventure provides opportunities to experience Japan's famous cherry blossoms in the heart of Kyoto, as well as Tokyo, the sacred resting places of shoguns at Nikko and feasting on local delights at Takayama.

More details 1300 360 887.

There are a number of special deals on offer this month for travellers wanting to experience the Australian outback, including half price companion fares when two people travel with both APT and AAT Kings.

The APT special applies to any Northern Territory short break of two days or more booked by 13 Feb, and there's also a 15% discount for single travellers - details www.aptravel.

AAT KINGS has 50% off the second passenger on its short breaks in Tasmania, the NT, Sydney and Melbourne, as well as 25% off for the second passenger on any of its Premium Escorted tours in Australia or NZ.

More info www.aatkings.com.

And if you're thinking of travelling to FIJI, changes to the laws there now allow tourists to claim back a 12% tax refund on shopping of more than FJ\$500 in one day at outlets in Suva and Nadi.

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