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MEDIA STATEMENT

Study on antioxidant supplements of limited relevance to Australian consumers

The Executive Director of the Australian Self-Medication Industry, Juliet Seifert, said today that a study which has raised concerns over commonly used vitamin supplements appeared to be based on atypical patterns of usage and had limited relevance to most Australian consumers.

The new meta-analysis study was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*¹ and has linked antioxidant supplement use to an increase in mortality.

“Consumers should not throw out their vitamin and mineral supplements in fear, or in the belief, that they provide no benefit,” Ms Seifert said.

“The statistical outcome of increased mortality was not seen until a select subset of studies was used, an effect not seen by a broader analysis of relevant studies. The researchers themselves are unable to determine a reason for the increased mortality from this selective analysis.”

The Professor of Nutrition and Epidemiology at Harvard University, Meir Stampfer, has been quoted in the media criticising the analysis for its use of studies that were too diverse to pool together, and because they looked at various combinations and doses of antioxidants in different groups with both healthy and chronic conditions.

“Some of the studies used in the analysis, use vitamins at doses greatly in excess of what is typically found in the Australian market,” Ms Seifert said.

“In some instances, these doses would only be accessible to consumers through a doctor’s prescription. The authors themselves state that they have not been able to assess how the supplements in question affect mortality in people with specific needs.

“The Australian market for vitamin and mineral supplements is not comparable to the American market, with a different set of formulation rules, regulatory requirements and advertising controls under the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

“Without an understanding of how these products are promoted for use in Australia and the expectations of consumers in terms of benefits to general health, the relevance of this analysis to the Australian market needs to be questioned,” Ms Seifert said.

1. “Mortality in Randomised Trials of Antioxidant Supplements for Primary and Secondary Prevention – Systematic Review and Analysis”, Bjelakovic G. et al, JAMA, 297(8): 842-855.

About ASMI: The Australian Self-Medication Industry (ASMI) is the peak industry body for the Australian self-care industry representing consumer healthcare products including over-the-counter medicines and complementary medicines. ASMI's mission is to promote better health through responsible self-care. This means ensuring that safe and effective self-care products are readily available to all Australians at a reasonable cost. ASMI works to encourage responsible use by consumers and an increasing role for cost-effective self-medication products as part of the broad national health strategy. www.asmi.com.au

Media contact: Bob Bowden (02) 9241 2811 0412 753 298