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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **ASMI conference brings self care to life**

Use of next-generation online health information services, improved health literacy, and increased access to medicines have the power to transform Australia's health system and ease pressure on health budgets, the Australian Self Medication Industry (ASMI) national conference in Sydney heard today.

The conference, *"Bringing Self Care to Life"*, saw speakers from sectors including the pharmaceutical industry, consumers, healthcare, and pharmacy examining ways of empowering consumers to take greater responsibility for personal health.

The example of the UK health system, where significant cost savings have been achieved, was outlined by Bob Gann, the Head of Strategy & Engagement for NHS Choices, the online 'front door' to the United Kingdom National Health Service (NHS).

He says that the service saves the UK system £44 million (\$74 million) a year by reducing avoidable and unnecessary GP consultations. It holds some 80,000 pages of information and has recorded 100 million visits over the past year.

One of the world's leading experts on the over-the-counter (OTC) medicines sector, Nicholas Hall outlined latest research findings on trends in the OTC market, and the benefits for consumers and taxpayers of prescription-to-OTC switches around the world.

The President of the European Men's Health Forum, Professor Ian Banks, detailed some of the critical issues facing men internationally including higher death rates amongst men for preventable conditions, suicide, men's reluctance to visit the GP or pharmacist, their use of the internet for health diagnosis, and the role of wives and partners in influencing men's health.

The Executive Director of ASMI, Dr Deon Schoombie said the conference demonstrates the extent to which some sensible and timely steps can make a significant difference to healthcare delivery and health outcomes for many Australians.

"There is a huge opportunity to ease the workload of the GP workforce by making better use of the skills of pharmacists in the management of minor ailments. The increasing sophistication of telephone and online health services and the professionalism of pharmacists mean that there should be no need for patients to have to queue for a GP to obtain first class medical advice.

“There are clear lessons as to how we can empower consumers to make good health choices, and how we make better use of our front line health workforce including pharmacists,” Dr Schoombie said.

One of the Federal Government’s key advisers on preventative health, Dr Tony Hobbs, emphasised the expanded role for GPs in an environment of improved preventative health and enhanced self care. Dr Hobbs is a GP, obstetrician, and the former Chair of the National Primary Health Care Strategy External Reference Group.

The issue of advertising of OTC medicines was canvassed extensively in a panel of consumer and industry experts, chaired by Dr Norman Swan, host of ABC Radio National’s, *The Health Report*.

Wider use of self-medication including better integration of OTC, complementary and prescription medicines was discussed by Dr Lesley Braun, a Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Surgery at Monash University, and a research pharmacist at Alfred Hospital, Melbourne.

For the full conference program, click [here](#) or go to [www.asmi.com.au/events](http://www.asmi.com.au/events)

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