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MEDIA STATEMENT

Analgesics containing codeine safe and effective for the majority of users

The Australian Self-Medication Industry (ASMI), the industry body representing non-prescription consumer healthcare products said today that the use of non-prescription medicines containing codeine was generally safe and effective for the vast majority of consumers who do use these products appropriately.

ASMI was commenting on an article published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* which was based on a study of 27 patients who either sought treatment for opioid addiction or were referred to a hospital addiction service between 2005 and 2008.

ASMI Regulatory and Scientific Affairs Director, Steven Scarff said over-the-counter (OTC) analgesics are for short term use for self limiting conditions, and longer term use should be under the direction of a GP or pharmacist.

“This was a very small study, comprising 27 people over three years. This needs to be seen in the context of the vast majority of people who use these products responsibly.

“It should be remembered that the mean dose range of those in the study was 37 to 47 tablets per day, with one patient taking up to 100 tablets per day. That level of use constitutes gross overuse, and is far in excess of what is recommended, and what is typical for the majority of consumers.

“These products are safe when used according to label instructions. In May 2010, access to these medicines was made more restrictive. These products are now only available behind the counter in pharmacies, and purchase requires the personal intervention of a pharmacist. That places pharmacists in a good position to engage with consumers and identify problem users.

“ASMI supports calls for high levels of awareness amongst healthcare professionals and pharmacy staff to identify problem users. Consumers should be reminded to follow the label instructions and to talk to their GP or pharmacist if their pain persists,” Mr Scarff said.

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

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