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## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **ASMI applauds steps to fill the knowledge gap for complementary medicines**

The Australian Self-Medication Industry (ASMI) has welcomed the findings of a study by the National Prescribing Service (NPS) into complementary medicines as an essential step in identifying the information needs of consumers and healthcare professionals.

Ruth Kendon, ASMI Regulatory & Technical Manager for Complementary Medicines said the findings should be viewed as a critical pathway in developing a plan to broaden information sources on complementary medicines.

The NPS study finds that pharmacists and GPs want a central, fast, online resource to help them find reliable information on complementary medicines.

Ms Kendon said that contraindications, interactions with drugs, and adverse reactions are some of the most important details needed when giving advice to consumers.

“The task now is to identify and promote reliable sources of information about complementary medicines.

“There is also a need for more investment in research to build the evidence base for these products. The Rudd Government has already provided much needed funding to help provide clinical evidence on complementary medicines to assist health professionals and consumers”.

The principle of self-care is fundamental to the future of Australia’s health system and complementary medicines play a key part in that process. Central to the idea of self care is an educated consumer, able to access reliable healthcare information and able to make appropriate and informed healthcare choices.

Quality Use of Medicines is a key element in this, as is the availability of high-quality, independent information for both consumers and retailers.

For the consumer who prefers complementary medicines as the first line of treatment, the expert in complementary medicines, the qualified naturopath or herbalist, is the obvious choice.

For the pharmacist or GP who will prescribe complementary medicines, co-operation with a reputable herbalist or naturopath can be of real assistance.



BETTER HEALTH THROUGH RESPONSIBLE SELF CARE



The NPS survey found that consumers rely mainly on family members and on the internet for their information.

“While it is quite understandable that family members might be seen as reliable, the internet is a different story,” Ms Kendon said.

“In cyber-space, high-quality scientific data and WHO-standard evidence of traditional use jostle with literally millions of sites touting the latest ‘miracle cures’, and blogs filled with well-meaning but unfounded theories and fads.

“It is hard enough for a qualified professional to find good data amongst all this clutter, let alone an untrained amateur”.

This new wealth of information – both good and flawed - has given rise to the ‘cyberchondriac’ – the person who comes to the health professional armed with sheaves of printouts, a ready-made diagnosis, and a shopping list gleaned from websites.

“The most effective way of tackling this phenomenon is to be armed with clear, reliable and detailed information on the multitude of available complementary medicines at the push of a button,” Ms Kendon said.

ASMI applauds Blackmores on launching its new evidence-based website in helping to fill this knowledge gap. To Blackmores’ credit, the site covers complementary medicines outside its own range, as well as independent material.

There are also a number of other credible websites, including Medline Plus, that provide quality information. The task ahead is to better promote these to consumers and healthcare professionals.

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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](http://www.asmi.com.au)

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