

MEDIA STATEMENT

Tightening of controls over complementary medicines not warranted

The Australian Self-Medication Industry (ASMI), the industry body representing non-prescription consumer healthcare products today disputed some of the proposed solutions reported in an article in the *Medical Journal of Australia* which claims that the regulatory framework for complementary medicines is fundamentally flawed.

The Scientific Director for ASMI, Deon Schoombie said that calls for tighter regulation of complementary and alternative medicines (CAMs), as suggested in the MJA article, were not justified. What is required is better enforcement of the existing system.

Regulation of medicines in Australia is based on a risk-based management model in which the aim is to ensure that the level of regulation is commensurate with the level of risk posed by the medicines.

CAMs are largely low risk products. They are evaluated for safety and quality and there is no pre-market assessment of efficacy. However, sponsors are required to hold the evidence to support efficacy claims. There is a post-market surveillance process of routine auditing aimed at ensuring that sponsors hold the required evidence.

ASMI believes that the design of the listing system is appropriate and ASMI does not agree with the authors that it should be scrapped. However, post-market surveillance regulatory activities could be significantly enhanced through optimal resourcing and targeted auditing.

Because of the critical importance of addressing public health issues associated with obesity, ASMI agrees with the view expressed that it would be appropriate at this time to focus more regulatory compliance activities on weight loss products.

While additional regulatory controls are provided through the formal approval of advertising in mainstream media as well as through the Complaints Resolution Panel, ASMI believes that these controls should not be a substitute for adequate levels of post-market surveillance.

ASMI agrees with the authors that the advertising scheme, particularly the process for complaints handling, should be adequately resourced to ensure that it is responsive and timely.

ASMI does not believe that consumers would be served well by putting disclaimers on products.

What is needed is consumer education and ASMI supports the notion of campaigns to educate the public. Consumers should be encouraged to seek more information about products from healthcare professionals and other reliable sources to assist them in making informed choices about the products they purchase.

There is scope for Government to play an enhanced role in educating consumers and investment in research to establish a more rigorous evidence base – this would help both the public and health professionals to make sound choices regarding appropriate complementary and alternative medicines.

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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