

NONPRESCRIPTION MEDICINES DIGEST



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Spring 2006

Welcome to the spring edition of the NMA Newsletter. This quarter, the focus is on suitable self-care references for professionals and the public. The following editorial was developed after reading a study about acute care facilities that were surveyed regarding their dietary supplement policies. As an aside, the survey also asked which resources were most often used when acute care pharmacists searched for information about dietary supplements. The answer may surprise faculty. Our second article looks at a study where researchers evaluated the suitability of supplemental materials for self-care medication available on the Internet to the public.

Don't forget to start planning for the NMA 2006 Conference to be held October 5-7 in Cincinnati. Information about last year's conference and the online application can be accessed at <http://nmafaculty.org/conference.htm>. **Remember: The deadline for applications is July 28, 2006.**

And if you haven't accessed the site in awhile, faculty will find new material added to the secure area and reference section. If you are looking for past articles or newsletters, search the archives at either of these locations: http://www.nmafaculty.org/newsletter/newsletters_archive.htm or <http://www.nmafaculty.org/news/otcnews.htm>. Please consider sharing this newsletter with any faculty colleagues who may be interested in keeping up with self-care topics.

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Dietary Supplements in Acute Care Settings: A Curricular Issue?

Dietary supplement usage, including vitamin, botanical, and nonbotanical products, is widespread among the U.S. population, especially within certain cultures. In recent years, the FDA and citizen groups have raised concerns about dietary supplements, ranging from manufacturing standards to the safety of these products. Because dietary supplements are available without a prescription, they are often not



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thought of as actual drugs. Students and pharmacists who work in ambulatory care versus acute care settings are usually more inclined to ask their patients about these drugs when completing a medication history. These students may also be more inclined to learn or remember information about these drugs. Providing adequate coverage of dietary supplements within an already crowded curriculum is difficult. Therefore, ensuring that all students understand how to find and use appropriate reference information may be most important. Dietary supplements are not just drugs used outside of acute care facilities, but are also important regarding overall drug therapy within these facilities, especially when looking at medication histories and reconciliation.

Students and pharmacists who work in acute care facilities spend less time working with self-care drugs than prescription drugs. While some acute care facilities have included questions about dietary supplements in their medication history documentation, others have not consistently done so. Recently both American Society of Health-System Pharmacists® (ASHP) and the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) have published statements encouraging and/or requiring medication reconciliation that would include documentation of dietary supplement usage.^{1,2} The ASHP "Statement on the Use of Dietary Supplements" also suggests that these drugs undergo as thorough a formulary review process as prescription drugs.¹

The January 2006 issue of *The American Journal of Health-System Pharmacists* included a study that primarily looked at dietary supplement policies in acute care facilities. The authors found that although the majority (62%) of facilities had some policy in place, these policies varied from not allowing any dietary supplement use to allowing the use of a patient's personal supply if ordered by an authorized prescriber.³ A portion of the latter group also allowed patients to keep their personal supply of dietary supplements at their bedside. In addition, the authors reported that the most common (66%) reference used by pharmacists when trying to find information about a supplement was "the Internet." No further explanation was given as to the specific Internet sites searched or whether these Internet sites were appropriate or valid. The authors did list other resources used such as the print version of *Natural Medicine Comprehensive Database*, *Alt Medex*, *Herbal Companion to AHFS DI*, and other similar peer-reviewed references as being separate from "the Internet."³

One concern this raises is that students and pharmacists who are primarily interested in practicing in acute care settings may either have not paid attention to or not been taught about appropriate references for this category of drugs within their curriculum. This could impact a student's lifelong learning abilities. Thus it is important for faculty who teach about self-care to ensure that all students, regardless of career path, have a firm foundation in assessing and documenting dietary supplement usage, safety concerns, and selecting valid, peer-reviewed resources. JCAHO's requirements for medication reconciliation will help reinforce the importance of acute care pharmacists learning about these drugs, but faculty must also reinforce choosing appropriate references in this area. This can be done through the drug information or informatics portion of the curriculum or as a follow-up to informatics within the self-care section of the curriculum. Regardless of how it is taught and/or reinforced, whether in didactic or experiential courses, college of pharmacy faculty must ensure that students understand the importance of an

appropriate knowledge base and appropriate references for dietary supplements.

References

¹ American Society of Health-System Pharmacists. Statement on the Use of Dietary Supplements. *Am J Health-Syst Pharm.* 2004;61:1707-11.

² Medication management standards. In: *Comprehensive Accreditation Manual for Hospitals*, 2004 update. Oakbrook Terrace, IL: Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations;2004:MM1-20.

³ Bazzie KL, Witmer DR, Pinto B, et al. National survey of dietary supplement policies in acute care facilities. *Am J Health-Syst Pharm.* 2006;63:65-70.

Evaluation of Written Materials About Nonprescription Medications

Researchers have recently reported results of their evaluation of written supplemental materials for nonprescription medications. Wallace, et al.¹, assessed the suitability, readability, and cultural appropriateness of written educational materials about nonprescription products that are widely available to the public via the Internet. While most of the materials were considered suitable, much of it was not at an appropriate reading level, and text often included uncommon words, which negatively impact understanding.

Materials about 37 OTC products were included in the study. The specific products selected were identified through review of 48 hours of television programming, and included popular items such as Aleve®, Bayer® aspirin, Claritin®, Metamucil®, Prilosec OTC®, and Tums®. After the most commonly advertised products were chosen, researchers located manufacturers' websites, and downloaded and printed material designed for consumer use.

Using the Suitability Assessment of Materials (SAM) instrument, written materials were judged in several categories, including: content, literacy demand, graphics, layout and typography, and cultural appropriateness. The SAM concept of "literacy demand" included readability and evaluations of writing style, vocabulary, and context. Readability was assessed using the Fry formula, which relies primarily on word and sentence length to estimate reading level.

Analysis showed that 86.5% of the materials were found to be adequate in terms of overall suitability, with graphics and illustrations rated as superior in one-third of the materials. However, 81.1% of the materials were found to be written at the 10th-grade reading level, though literacy experts generally recommend writing at a 6th-grade level. In addition, 40.9% of the materials included uncommon words (e.g., enzyme, ferment) that limit understanding.

Nonprescription medications are widely advertised on television, and the general public increasingly accesses the Internet to seek additional information about these products. While the information they find there was found to be suitable for the most part, consumers may be challenged by the reading level and unfamiliar terms in these supplemental materials.

For additional information, refer to:

Wallace LS, Rogers ES, Turner LW, Keenum AJ, Weiss BD. Suitability of written supplemental materials available on the Internet for nonprescription medications. *Am J Health-Syst Pharm.* 2006;63:71-8.

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