

Medicine Update

Medicine Update is an online publication from the National Prescribing Service, designed for patients who may have been prescribed medicines recently listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

Medicine Update is available at www.nps.org.au/consumers/publications/medicine_update and can be read in conjunction with the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflet.

The December issues cover:

- tramadol and its new extended-release formulation
- zoledronic acid, a once-yearly intravenous bisphosphonate for osteoporosis.

Both medicines are also reviewed for health professionals in the December issue of NPS RADAR at www.npsradar.org.au

Medicines Australia Code of Conduct: breaches

The Medicines Australia Code of Conduct guides the promotion of prescription products by pharmaceutical companies.¹ Each year Medicines Australia publishes a report, from its Code of Conduct Committee, which details all the complaints that have been received about advertising and other promotional activities.

This year's report² differs from previous reports because of increased scrutiny of educational events. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission now requires Medicines Australia to report details of the educational events held or sponsored by member companies. This information is available on the Medicines Australia website (at www.medicinesaustralia.com.au).

Medicines Australia appointed an independent auditor to check that the educational events contained in the reports complied with the Code of Conduct. This resulted in the Medicines Australia Monitoring Committee referring 52 events to the Code of Conduct Committee. As there were only 83 new complaints in 2007–08, educational events account for most of the total.

Table 1 shows 37 cases where at least one breach of the Code of Conduct was found. The majority of cases involved

educational events where the hospitality was deemed to be out of proportion to the educational content of the event. The Code of Conduct still applies even if the event is held overseas. These transgressions resulted in a range of fines. A dinner for four specialists in Adelaide attracted a fine of \$10 000 while dinner for nine specialists at the Hotel de Paris in Monaco attracted a fine of \$50 000. Inappropriately luxurious and extravagant hospitality resulted in one company being fined \$175 000.

While most of the promotional activity was directed at prescribers, nurses and pharmacists also attended events which breached the Code of Conduct.

Detailed information about the complaints can be found in the annual report of the Code of Conduct Committee.²

References

1. Medicines Australia. Code of Conduct. 15th ed. 2006. Amended 2007. <http://www.medicinesaustralia.com.au> [cited 2008 Nov 10]
2. Medicines Australia Code of Conduct Annual Report 2007/2008. Canberra: Medicines Australia; 2008. <http://www.medicinesaustralia.com.au> [cited 2008 Nov 10]

Table 1

Breaches of the Code of Conduct July 2007 – June 2008

Company	Product or activity	Sanction imposed by Code of Conduct Committee
Abbott	Reductil (sibutramine)	Withdraw promotional material \$10 000 fine
Allergan	Extravagant hospitality	\$175 000 fine
Amgen	Extravagant hospitality Extravagant hospitality	\$10 000 fine \$50 000 fine
AstraZeneca	Crestor (rosuvastatin) Extravagant hospitality	Withdraw promotional material (previously found in breach of the Code) \$80 000 fine \$10 000 fine
Baxter	Extravagant hospitality	\$35 000 fine

Continued over

Biogen	Extravagant hospitality	\$10 000 fine
Boehringer Ingelheim	Micardis (telmisartan)	Withdraw promotional material \$25 000 fine
CSL	Extravagant hospitality Extravagant hospitality	\$50 000 fine \$40 000 fine
Device Technologies	Penthrox (methoxyflurane)	Withdraw material from website Corrective letter
Eli Lilly	Actos (pioglitazone)	Corrective letter (already sent)
GlaxoSmithKline	Seretide (fluticasone/salmeterol) Seretide (fluticasone/salmeterol) Extravagant hospitality Extravagant hospitality Extravagant hospitality	Withdraw detailing aid Corrective letter \$50 000 fine Withdraw promotional material \$50 000 fine \$20 000 fine \$100 000 fine \$90 000 fine
Hospira	Eligard (leuprorelin)	Withdraw promotional material Corrective letter \$50 000 fine
Ipsen	Extravagant hospitality	\$30 000 fine
Nycomed	Extravagant hospitality Extravagant hospitality	\$70 000 fine reduced to \$35 000 on appeal \$60 000 fine
Octapharma	Octagam (immunoglobulin)	Withdraw promotional material Corrective letter \$50 000 fine
Pfizer	Lipitor (atorvastatin) Crestor (rosuvastatin) Extravagant hospitality	Withdraw promotional material \$50 000 fine Corrective letter Company staff to comply with the Code \$200 000 fine \$20 000 fine
Pharmion	Extravagant hospitality	\$25 000 fine
Roche	Media releases	Remove media releases from website \$60 000 fine reduced to \$40 000 on appeal \$40 000 fine \$20 000 fine increased to \$30 000 on appeal
Sanofi-aventis	Actonel (risedronate)	Withdraw detailing aid Corrective letter \$100 000 fine reduced to \$80 000 on appeal
Schering-Plough	Olmotec (olmesartan) Olmotec (olmesartan)	Withdraw promotional material Corrective letter Corrective advertisement Amend minimum product information Corrective advertisement \$50 000 fine
Servier	Extravagant hospitality Extravagant hospitality Extravagant hospitality	\$20 000 fine \$60 000 fine \$50 000 fine
Solvay	Extravagant hospitality Extravagant hospitality	\$20 000 fine \$80 000 fine
Wyeth	Extravagant hospitality	\$35 000 fine