

Media Release

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ABC Causes Controversy with Sensationalised USA Supplement Story

Complementary Medicines Australia (CMA) is disappointed that the ABC Four Corners producers chose to air a sensationalised story about US products last night, *Supplements and Safety*, after CMA had raised concerns with the ABC that the US program has no merit here in Australia.

“We are also disgusted that the ABC agreed to provide a level of balance by acknowledging the strict regulatory environment for Australian complementary medicines and then failed to do so,” said Mr Carl Gibson, chief executive officer of CMA.

The story asked questions about the quality and safety of vitamins and dietary supplements but was a joint New York Times and PBS Frontline story. CMA informed the ABC last week that comparisons cannot be drawn between US and Australian supplements as the quality control environment in the US is very different to here in Australia.

“The US regulates supplements as food, whilst Australia regulates supplements similar to that of pharmaceuticals standards. In fact, the Australian regulatory regime for complementary medicines is such that it is viewed by most countries as the consumer protection benchmark,” said Mr Gibson.

“A US produced story about supplements is very misleading to consumers and unfairly damaging to an Australian industry that contributes \$4.2 billion a year to the nation’s economy.”

“Placed in the correct context, as it should have been, the story highlights that consumers need to be aware that products purchased online from overseas are not subject to the same regulations as those enforced in Australia.”

The strict Australian regulatory environment mandates that the following occur in the manufacture of products available on the Australian market:

- Australian products only use ingredients assessed as safe and allowed at safe levels by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). This is not so in the US.
- The TGA mandates verification testing of all active ingredients before a product is manufactured, which provides assurance to Australian consumers that they receive what's stated on the label. This is not mandatory in the US.
- Every batch of finished tablets /capsules is tested for active ingredients within the label claim.
- Stability studies ensure that the product remains potent and safe throughout its shelf life.
- Product quality reviews ensure that quality data is aggregated and tracked over time, allowing the industry to identify and act on any emerging trends.

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- Adverse events are rigorously captured and monitored by the TGA so that any emerging issues can be identified and addressed quickly.

“Supplements sold over the internet are unlikely to have been evaluated by the TGA, which means there is no surety that the product contains what it says it does.”

“The complementary medicines industry in Australia is governed by strict quality and safety criteria and consumers can have confidence in the quality of the herbal, vitamin or mineral medicines they chose for their health and wellbeing,” Mr Gibson went on to say.

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