

Media Release

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Consumers can be confident in herbal medicines sold in Australia

Setting the record straight on a recent scare report about the risk of herbal medicines sold in Australia, Mr Carl Gibson, ceo of Complementary Medicines Australia (CMA) said today: “reports of this kind are ill-informed and misleading, and ignore the fact that Australia has one of the most highly regulated environments in the world for complementary medicine products, which includes herbal medicines.”

In Australia, products are manufactured to a pharmaceutical standard under Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP), and strict safety and quality regulations are enforced by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). Products sold legally in Australia must be entered on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG), and they are subject to assessments and requirements which ensure their quality and safety.

“This may not be the case for products available for purchase overseas. Products purchased online from overseas are not subject to the same regulations as those enforced in Australia, which means there may be no surety that the product contains what it says it does. Online purchases should only be made on the recommendation of a qualified healthcare professional or from a known and reputable source.”

“CMA and the Australian complementary medicines industry also support the work of the American Botanical Council (ABC) in relation to the Botanical Adulterants Program, to ensure that our industry is informed and forewarned about global developments and any possible quality issues with raw materials,” said Mr Gibson.

Founder and Executive Director of the ABC, Mark Blumenthal explains: “the Program informs the industry worldwide about the most common causes of both intentional and unintentional adulteration, and provides the tools for product sponsors to combat those causes of unintentional adulteration when developing or reviewing strategies for minimising risk.”

Mr Gibson said: “If concerned about the quality and safety of products, consumers should look at the labels – if manufactured by a laboratory licensed by the TGA, they will be marked Registered Aust R or Listed Aust L.”

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“CMA stresses that it is important that consumers seek the advice of a healthcare professional before purchasing medicines – and to ensure they disclose their use to their healthcare practitioners. Care should always be exercised – as with any type of medicine – when there is potential for interactions between pharmaceutical drugs, herbs or other medications.”

“GPs, pharmacists, and other healthcare practitioners cannot ignore the fact that their patients choose to use complementary medicines to support their health goals; practitioners should make it their business to improve their knowledge of complementary medicines.”

A recent systematic literature review found that it is no longer “ethically or professionally acceptable” for pharmacists to ignore patients’ use of complementary medicines. The reviewers argue that the evidence is in support of an expanding role for the pharmacist in the area of traditional and complementary medicines. This included ensuring the safe and appropriate use of complementary medicines, which goes beyond being diligent about potential adverse events to recommending the best possible products, educating patients about the quality use of complementary medicines and encouraging them to report their use to their doctors and other health professionals.ⁱ

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ⁱ Ung, C, Harnett, J. (2017). *Community pharmacist’s responsibilities with regards to traditional medicine/complementary medicine products: A systematic literature review*. *Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy* 13 688-716

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