

NEWS RELEASE

OTC Advertising is an awareness tool not a replacement for a consumer product label

Ottawa, Ontario – September 12, 2012

Consumer Health Products Canada, the association representing makers of OTC and natural health products, responded today to the recent research letter to the editor of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) comparing the volume of warnings in advertising for prescription medicines with that of OTC medicines. CHP Canada stated that author of the research letter overlooks fundamental differences in the role of advertising between OTC medicines and prescription medicines.

“The research letter is trying to compare apples to oranges. There are fundamental differences in the way consumers interact with OTC products vs. prescription products and subsequently what sources they go to for information about risks and benefits” said CHP Canada spokesperson Adam Kingsley, “Consumers look to the product label for information about OTC benefits and risks, not advertising. This is due to the fact that the OTC label is available to them prior to purchase, at the time of purchase, and every time they use the product.”

In Canada professional and prescription medicines generally do not have labels that the consumer can see prior to making a purchase decision. OTC and NHPs have complete labels with both benefits and risks available to ensure informed decision making by the consumer. Health Canada’s Health Products and Food Branch (HPFB) held a national consultation on the issue of risk communication in consumer health product advertising in the summer of 2006. As a result Health Canada directed marketers of OTC medicines to ensure consumer health product advertising provides a linkage for consumers directing them to read and follow the label directions, as this was the most appropriate source of information about the products risks and benefits in order to make an informed choice.

CHP Canada also noted that advertisements for OTCs in Canada all contain a statement directing consumers that the product may not be right for them, and to always read and follow the label directions. In Canada, all consumer advertising must go through a rigorous pre-clearance process against the Health Canada rules and requirements to receive approval from one of the advertising preclearance agencies, such as Advertising Standards Canada, before being aired or printed.

CHP Canada is a 115 year-old trade association representing the consumer health products industry, including the manufacturers of natural health products and over-the-counter remedies.



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