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## Americans Urged To “Be MedWise” When Using Over-The-Counter Medicines *As Clearer Labels Appear on OTC Drugs, Major Survey Finds More Education Needed*

**Washington, DC; January 22, 2002** – At a time when Americans buy over five billion over-the-counter (OTC) drug products each year, a broad-based coalition of health-related organizations is taking new steps to help Americans understand and use these products appropriately.

At a Washington press conference today, the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPPIE) -- joined by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and public health leaders -- launched *Be MedWise*, a public education campaign about the safe use of OTC medicines. Coinciding with the changeover in 2002 to a standardized “Drug Facts” label on the majority of nonprescription drugs, the campaign will use the new label as one way to raise awareness that OTC drugs are serious medicines that must be taken with care.

“Nonprescription medicines play a vital role in the American healthcare system and the trend towards self care. But OTC drugs are real medicines that must be taken responsibly,” said Linda Golodner, president of the National Consumers League and NCPPIE’s chairman. “For this reason, consumers need to read OTC drug labels, compare ingredients in different products, and understand how to take OTC products correctly.”

### **New *Be MedWise* Web Site, TV/Radio Spots**

To raise awareness that OTC medicines should be taken with care, the *Be MedWise* campaign will use multiple information channels to convey solutions-oriented information, including television and radio announcements and a new Web site – **[www.bemedwise.org](http://www.bemedwise.org)**. McNeil Consumer & Specialty Pharmaceuticals provided an unrestricted educational grant to develop the campaign.

“An important message of this public education effort is to encourage more Americans to seek out the advice of pharmacists and other health professionals about how to take OTC medicines correctly,” said Thomas Menighan, R.Ph., MBA, a pharmacist and the president of the American Pharmaceutical Association, a part of the NCPPIE coalition. “With the increasing availability of OTC drugs, this dialogue is more important than ever before.”

### Health Professionals Define Issue: Consumers May Not Recognize Potential Risks

The campaign is the outgrowth of one of the most comprehensive national surveys ever undertaken to examine attitudes and beliefs about the use of OTC medicines. Conducted for NCPIE by Harris Interactive, the survey compared the perceptions of 1,011 adult Americans with a national sample of physicians, nurses and pharmacists and found that while 79 percent of the medical professionals surveyed say they are somewhat or very concerned about the inappropriate use of OTC medicines, many Americans do not recognize the potential risks of taking OTC medicines incorrectly.

The survey also revealed that a third of adult Americans (33 percent) — or over 64 million consumers — say they have taken more than the recommended dose of a nonprescription medicine. Of these individuals, the survey reported that two thirds (69 percent) take more than the recommended amount at a single time; three fifths (63 percent) take the next dose sooner than directed; and two fifths (44 percent) take more than the recommended number of doses in a day.

In addition, the survey found that many consumers are overlooking important information that could aid them in taking OTC drugs more effectively. For example, even though three-fifths of Americans (59 percent) take nonprescription medicines routinely, the survey found that most Americans don't know the active ingredients in the OTC products they are using. When asked to identify the active ingredient in common brands of OTC pain relievers, only 34 percent knew this information.

Equally important in designing a public education campaign, the survey examined what people look for when reading OTC medicines. Encouraging news, according to the survey, is that the vast majority of Americans who use nonprescription medicines (95 percent) read some portion of the OTC label when they buy a nonprescription medication or use it for the first time. But the survey found that many consumers only seek partial information. For example, when asked what they look for when buying an OTC drug for the first time, only a third (34 percent) of those surveyed said they look for the active ingredient, while one in five (19 percent) said they seek out the usage directions (e.g. how to take the product) and one in six (16 percent) look at the dosage level.

“OTC medicines are very safe when taken as directed and that's why the *Be MedWise* campaign is so important,” said W. Ray Bullman, executive vice president of NCPIE. “At a time when consumers will have a new and easy-to-use OTC drug label, this campaign can help consumers understand all the information on the new labels and how to put these facts to use.”

The *Be MedWise* campaign also comes at a time when the majority of OTC drug products are changing over to a new “Drug Facts” label during 2002. Required by the FDA, the new label will make it easier to select the most appropriate OTC drug product and understand its benefits and risks. Many OTC products already carry this new label.

## **About NCPIE**

Established in 1982, the National Council on Patient Information and Education is a diverse nonprofit coalition that works to stimulate and improve the communication of information about the appropriate use of prescription and OTC medicines, such as through *Talk About Prescriptions Month* every October. NCPIE's members include consumer organizations; patient advocacy groups; voluntary health agencies; schools of medicine, pharmacy and nursing; health-related trade associations; prescription and over-the-counter pharmaceutical manufacturers; and local, state and federal government agencies. More information about NCPIE is available through its Web site:

**[www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org)**

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