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Pharmacists/Health Professionals Mobilize To Encourage Americans to “*Be MedWise*” About Over-the-Counter Medicines

Procter & Gamble Provides \$1 Million Grant for New Initiative

Cincinnati, OH, August 15, 2002 – With Americans taking an increasing interest in their health and the use of over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, a broad-based coalition is launching a new program to help ensure consumers know who to ask for advice when they have questions about how and when to take these products.

With an unrestricted educational grant from Procter & Gamble, the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE) of Bethesda, MD today announced a new initiative to encourage consumers to ask their pharmacists when they have questions about the best way to use OTC medicines.

As part of NCPIE’s ongoing *Be MedWise* public education campaign, this new program will reach consumers through retail pharmacies, clinics, and other community settings with the message that OTC products are serious medicines that must be taken as directed.

“With the increasing availability of OTC drugs, it is important for consumers to read the OTC drug label, follow directions, and when they have questions, to talk to their pharmacist,” said Janet Engle, Pharm.D., president of the American Pharmaceutical Association (APhA) and associate dean of the College of Pharmacy, University of Illinois at Chicago. “By promoting a real dialogue between consumers and their pharmacists, this program will provide the advice that Americans need at the time when this information will be most valuable.”

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Research Supports Encouraging Consumers to ask their Pharmacist for Advice When They Have Questions

The need to encourage consumers to ask their pharmacists for advice about non-prescription drugs became clear when NCPPIE commissioned a comprehensive national survey to examine attitudes and beliefs and OTC medicines. Conducted by Harris Interactive, the survey compared the perceptions of 1,011 adult Americans with a national sample of health professionals -- including 151 pharmacists -- and found that many Americans have questions about selecting and using these products.

Moreover, the survey revealed that many pharmacists are already playing this counseling role. On average, the poll found that pharmacists interact with over 250 patients (269) a week, with 25 percent of pharmacists having access to over 400 people. When counseling consumers about OTC drug use, the vast majority of pharmacists (72 percent) report spending more than a minute providing advice about when and how to take OTC medicines correctly.

Conducted between October and December 2001, the Harris study consisted of two complementary polls: one of 1,011 adult Americans aged 18 and over, and the other involving pharmacists, nurses and general practice physicians. Of the 451 health professionals surveyed, 151 were pharmacists

Mobilizing the Pharmacy Community

To build upon this counseling relationship, NCPPIE will enlist the pharmacy community in promoting the *Be MedWise* campaign through chain drug stores, community pharmacists and community-based clinics and community/senior centers. Towards this end, Procter & Gamble is committing \$1 million in funding through an educational grant.

“While we know the vast majority of consumers are using our OTC medicines properly, we also know that some have questions and that pharmacists are a highly-trusted source of information,” said Mary Lynn Ferguson-McHugh, Vice President of North American Personal Health Care for Procter & Gamble. “That’s why we’re eager to support educational programs like *Be MedWise*. It’s in everyone’s interest.”

About *Be MedWise*/NCPPIE

Launched in January 2002, the *Be MedWise* campaign employs a wide variety of media channels – the mass media, print and broadcast advertising, the Internet and consumer education materials – to help Americans select and use OTC medicines wisely.

Coinciding with the recent move to a standardized “Drug Facts” label on the majority of nonprescription drugs, the campaign features a new web site – www.bemedwise.org – where consumers, health professionals, educators, and the media can get detailed information about the new OTC label and how to compare products, learn about dosages, and understand information about specific warnings.

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Established in 1982, the National Council on Patient Information and Education is a diverse non-profit 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.

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