

A Word in your ear



Professional practice article

I do hope that you read the professional practice article carefully. Mandi has identified some of the legislative issues that can be very important in our daily practice. We need to take responsibility

for our actions every single day. If we don't stick to the legal and ethical requirements, we may just end up facing a disciplinary hearing at the Pharmacy Council. I think that might be the worst nightmare that someone registered with Council has. At best, they may decide to take no further action, depending on how good you are at explaining what happened and that you actually didn't do what was reported. At worst, you may lose your registration, and therefore your job, and therefore your income, and therefore your ability to provide for your family. Not a comforting thought, and good reason to make sure that you always practise within the law.

Abuse and misuse of medicines

One of the things that the article mentions is the abuse of medicines, including over-the-counter medicines. One of the mistakes that we, as consumers, make is to think that because you can buy something over the counter, it is always safe. Think about paracetamol – really useful painkiller, really safe if taken correctly for short periods of time. But it's also been used in suicide attempts, and long term overuse can cause serious damage. So when that customer comes into the pharmacy, and frequently requests analgesic tablets, you have a responsibility to refer her to the pharmacist. Perhaps she needs referral to a doctor for treatment of an underlying condition. If it's a combination product, perhaps she needs advice on abuse.

The same thing applies to analgesic powders. Is the person taking it because of a pain that will actually respond to the ingredients? Or is he relying on "feeling better" after taking it?

The codeine problem is very real. It is well documented that consumers are abusing these products, and that pharmacists have been asked to control the sale of these products. You can also help. Make sure that not

only do you record all sales, but that you are able to retrieve the information and identify customers who are buying quantities greater than required for self-medication of a self-limiting condition.

Advertising of medicines

We didn't put it into *Expand your portfolio* but I think it would be an interesting exercise for you to analyse the advertisements for medicines that you see in newspapers and magazines, and even on television. How many of them are clearly compliant with the legal requirements? How many try to avoid the requirements by sneaking in aspects that are not quite within the spirit of the law? And do you see ads with packshots that purport to be merely telling the price of the medicine? I know what the answer is – I see a lot of the reports that come to Pharmacy Council.

If we want to be even more careful, try analysing the advertisements for products that are *not* registered with the Medicines Control Council. Do this especially for so-called nutritional supplements and complementary medicines. Do they make any medicinal claims? Did you know that this is illegal? Any advertisement that makes a medicinal claim must be supported by the scientific information that was submitted for registration. While the Medicines Control Council has started the process of calling up complementary medicines for registration, the criteria have yet to be established and regulated. So treat these advertisements, and products, with caution if they make wild and wonderful claims.

Expiry dates

Another important issue raised is that of expiry dates. There was a recent highly publicised case in Gauteng, where a pharmacist's assistant handed out anti-epilepsy medicine that had expired. A comment was made that the medicine was only three months past its expiry date and would be safe. This might possibly be so, but the onus is on the manufacturer to test it, and to re-label it with a new expiry date if this is the case. The onus on you and me is to supply it only according to the expiry date that is actually printed on the label. As a pharmacist's assistant, you have an important role to play in stock control and making sure that patients are not supplied with expired medicines.

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