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Tong, V, Raynor, DK orcid.org/0000-0003-0306-5275 and Aslani, P (2016) Standardised over-the-counter medicine labels – can we do it? Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy, 12 (5). e19-e19. ISSN 1551-7411

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sapharm.2016.05.051

Standardised over-the-counter medicine labels – can we do it?

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Introduction. In 2012 and 2014, the Therapeutic Goods Administration initiated consultations proposing the implementation of a standardised over-the-counter (OTC) medicine label format in Australia. Previous research has indicated mixed consumer opinions regarding the proposed label format presented in the 2012 consultation paper (Tong et al, 2015). Furthermore, there is limited evidence demonstrating the usability of the proposed formats.

Aims. (i) To develop and examine the performance of alternative OTC medicine label formats for standardisation and; (ii) Explore consumer perspectives on the alternative label formats and required label improvements

Methods. Findings from an initial qualitative consumer needs analysis were reviewed by an international expert panel and used to guide the development of alternative label formats. A total of four alternative OTC label formats were developed for the exemplar medicine diclofenac. Individual face-to-face interviews with demographically matched cohorts of 10 consumers (total n=50) are currently being conducted to user test each alternative label format, as well as a current label for an existing diclofenac product. Each interview consists of: (i) administration of a user testing questionnaire to quantitatively measure consumers' ability to find and understand key points of information pertaining to diclofenac when using one of the labels and; (ii) a semi-structured interview exploring consumer perspectives.

Results. To date, 21 interviews have been conducted. Overall, the label formats have performed well in supporting consumers' ability to both find and understand key points of information for diclofenac such as the indication, dosage, maximum daily dose, contraindications, treatment duration and further information sources. When shown all labels, consumer perspectives on the label formats varied. Factors such as perceived usability, use of colour, design, content, and/or content ordering impacted consumer preferences and subsequent rankings of the labels.

Discussion. Despite the overall satisfactory performance demonstrated by the label formats, consumer perspectives are diverse and should be considered when working towards an OTC medicine label format for standardisation.

Tong V et al (2015) Health Expect. DOI: 10.1111/hex.12389.