

# Regulatory Matters

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## Aminoglycoside antibiotics: restrictive measures

**Spain** — In the light of a review it has undertaken on the efficacy and safety of a number of aminoglycoside antibiotics, the Ministry of Health has decided, having regard to their narrow therapeutic index and their toxic potential, to withdraw parenteral dosage forms of paromomycin and to restrict the use of dibekacin, kanamycin and ribostamycin to hospitals with microbiological laboratory facilities for antibiotic sensitivity testing.

**Reference:** Instituto Nacional de la Salud. *Información Terapéutica de la Seguridad Social*, 13: 7 (1989).

## Aphrodisiac activity: no more claims

**United States of America** — The sale of nonprescription drugs promoted as aphrodisiacs will be banned from 8 January 1990. Among the ingredients contained in many of the products are: anise, cantharides (or "Spanish fly", a chemical derived from the dried bodies of beetles), estrogens, fennel, ginseng, golden seal, tou kila, Korean ginseng, licorice, mandrake, methyltestosterone, minerals, nux vomica, Pego Palo, sarsaparilla, strychnine, testosterone, vitamins and yohimbine. The Food and Drug Administration has no evidence to show that any of the materials traditionally used as aphrodisiacs are either effective or safe. Only the male sex hormones, which are potent compounds associated with potentially serious side-effects, are known to influence libido. It advises patients with sexual problems to consult their doctor and not to indulge in self-medication.

### References

1. *Federal Register*, 54: 28780-28786 (1989).
2. *FDA Talk Paper*, T89-42 (1989).

## Cosmetics: disclosure of ingredients

**Canada** — Since 1978, manufacturers of cosmetics have been required by regulation to provide the Health Protection Branch with a qualitative and quantitative listing of all ingredients of cosmetic products as a condition of marketing. However, this information has not been available to the consumer. The Branch is now proposing that these regulations be amended to require all ingredients to be declared on product labelling by common names most familiar to consumers and in descending order of concentration. The objective is to enable purchasers to identify products containing ingredients to which they are sensitive. Comments are being requested from interested parties on whether, as an additional requirement, a centralized data base providing information on the composition of cosmetic products should also be created.

**Reference:** Health Protection Branch, Health and Welfare, Canada, *Information Letter*, No. 768 (1989).

## Ethylene oxide: a potential carcinogen?

**United Kingdom** — The Licensing Authority has requested information from pharmaceutical manufacturers on the use of ethylene oxide both as a disinfecting and sterilizing agent, and in chemical syntheses. Experimental evidence to show that it may act as a genotoxic carcinogen has raised concerns that significant residues — both of ethylene oxide itself and its breakdown products, including ethylene halohydrin and ethylene glycol — may exist in some medicinal products.

Manufacturers are asked to supply data on any product, ingredient or component which includes or has been exposed to ethylene oxide or its degradation products. Non-ionic surfactants, herbs/spices,

starches, capsule shells, bulk laxatives, pre-sterilized containers and delivery systems are specifically mentioned.

Information has also been requested on any changes in production processes that have been introduced to eliminate exposure to ethylene oxide.

**Reference:** Letter from the Department of Health and Social Security, London, June 1989.

## Hair restorers on prescription only

**United States of America** — The Food and Drug Administration has announced that sale of any non-prescription hair cream, lotion or other external product claiming to grow hair or prevent baldness, will be banned as from 8 January 1990.

Products currently promoted for this purpose include amino acids, amino-benzoic acid, ascorbic acid, benzoic acid, biotin and all other B-vitamins, dexpanthenol, estradiol and other topical hormones, jojoba oil, lanolin, nucleic acids, polysorbate 20, polysorbate 60, sulfanilamide, sulfur 1% on carbon in a fraction of paraffinic hydrocarbons, tetracaine hydrochloride, urea, and wheat germ oil. The agency has received no data to establish the safety and effectiveness of these or any other ingredients.

The ban is directed specifically at products for external use. The Food and Drug Administration has warned, however, that it will be extended on a case-by-case basis to other products for which such claims continue to be made, including oral formulations of vitamins and food supplements.

At present, a 2% topical solution of minoxidil, which is subject to prescription control, is the only product approved by the Food and Drug Administration for stimulating hair growth in individuals with male-pattern baldness.

### References

1. *HHS News*, P89-32 (1989).
2. *Federal Register*, 54: 28772-28777 (1989).

## Mefloquine: restrictive labelling

**Federal Republic of Germany** — In the light of recent reports of adverse neurological reactions associated with the antimalarial agent, mefloquine sulfate, the Federal Health Office has reminded doctors that this preparation is indicated only for the treatment of infections due to multiresistant strains of *Plasmodium falciparum* and for prophylaxis in short-term visitors to countries where such strains are endemic. It is now specifically contraindicated in patients with a history of epilepsy and, for prophylaxis, in aircraft pilots. The labelling must also include a warning that anyone taking the drug should be particularly careful when driving or operating machinery, and an indication that adverse neurological effects, including depression, confusion, anxiety, hallucinations, paranoia and convulsions, have been associated with use of the drug, even at the lowest dosage schedules.

**Reference:** Mefloquin: Ergänzungen in der Packungsbeilage zu den Abschnitten Nebenwirkungen und Kontraindikationen. *Bundesgesundheitsblatt*, 10: 469-470 (1989).

## Metamizole: withdrawal of combination products

**Spain** — The Ministry of Health has announced that all fixed combination products containing metamizole sodium — with the exception of those containing a spasmolytic — will be withdrawn from the market. This will affect a large range of products in which metamizole is variously combined with other analgesics, antibiotics, barbiturates, corticosteroids and vitamins. In announcing this decision, the National Institute of Health has commented that such combination products result in much unnecessary use of metamizole, which is known to be associated with cases of agranulocytosis. Restrictions have also been imposed on the labelling of single ingredient preparations of metamizole which may now be indicated only for short-term symptomatic relief of post-traumatic and post-operative pain, abdominal colic, and high fever unresponsive to other antipyretics.

**Reference:** Instituto Nacional de la Salud. *Información Terapéutica de la Seguridad Social*, 13: 6-7 (1989).

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### **Sulfonamides: suppository formulations withdrawn**

**Spain** — The Ministry of Health has announced the withdrawal of a suppository formulation of the antibiotic combination, trimethoprim and sulfamethoxazole. The action has been taken in the light of evidence that absorption of sulfonamides by this route is unacceptably erratic. It is planned to subject other suppositories that contain sulfonamides to review very shortly.

**Reference:** Instituto Nacional de la Salud. *Información Terapéutica de la Seguridad Social*, 123: 4 (1989).

### **L-Tryptophan supplements and eosinophilia-myalgia syndrome**

**United States of America** — The Food and Drug Administration has informed WHO that it is impounding all finished dosage forms of preparations containing the amino acid L-tryptophan, as well as shipments of the bulk substance intended for importation into the USA. All non-prescription

products containing "supplements" of L-tryptophan were earlier recalled when it was established that they were associated with eosinophilia-myalgia syndrome. This is a condition which is characterized by severe muscle and joint pain, swelling of the arms and legs, skin rash and, sometimes, by fever. Over 700 cases have been notified thus far and a suspected association with several deaths is being investigated. Evidence of possible chemical or microbial contamination is being sought but, as yet, no cause for the illness has been established. Many of these patients were taking the substance in daily quantities of 1 to 2 grams.

Foods containing L-tryptophan as a natural ingredient and multi-ingredient food products containing the amino acid as a minor ingredient are excluded from recall. At issue are several hundred unapproved products that have been used in attempts to treat a variety of problems including sleeping difficulties, premenstrual syndrome, stress and depression.

**Reference:** Update on L-tryptophan, *FDA Talk Paper*, T89-76 (1989).