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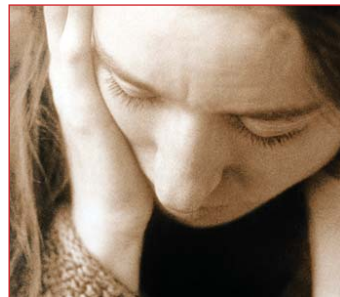
New code may feature whistleblowing

Jennifer Joseph

MANDATORY reporting of co-workers with suspected mental health problems or competency issues may be considered a feature in the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's (PSA) updated Code of Professional Conduct.

Discussions at the Inaugural Pharmacy Law and Ethics Workshop, held at the University of Sydney's Australian Association for Professional Applied Ethics (AAPAE) conference on 15-17 June, welcomed suggestions and criticisms of the current code from pharmacy's network of academic, practice and law professionals.

University of Sydney lecturer and workshop leader Dr Betty Chaar said potential ethical issues for the PSA to review included whistleblowing, mentoring, patient autonomy and formally



PSA CODE: Blow whistle on mentally ill.

respecting the rights of the indigenous community.

Dr Chaar said it was time for the profession to "face our demons" and decide what values it wants to identify with.

"We have a moral responsibility to keep revising the code. From experience, the older you get the harder it is to catch up with new nuances of ethics because ethics and social norms change. Rolling out the new code will be our biggest challenge," said Dr Chaar.

Experts debated whether

the code should be made up of aspirational principles or operational examples of conduct, be written in "plain English" to encourage the community to monitor pharmacists' professional standards, and how ethics can be better implemented into pharmacy practice.

"There is a need for education and training to support these changes. The undergraduate study of ethics as well as law – because it's possible to be legal and unethical as well as ethical and illegal – is important so that our students who become our graduates learn to grapple with this in a safe environment and then understand the requirements of our profession," said Maree Simpson, Associate Professor in the School of Biomedical Sciences at Charles Sturt University.

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Hypertension drugs linked to cancer

Nick O'Donoghue

RESULTS from a meta-analysis show patients treated with angiotensin-receptor blockers (ARBs) have an increased risk of developing a cancer.

The analysis published in *The Lancet Oncology* reported a small but significant increased risk of cancer among patients taking ARBs for treatment of hypertension, heart failure, diabetic nephropathy, and, recently, for cardiovascular risk reduction.

"We found that ARBs are associated with a modestly increased risk of new cancer occurrence.

"The finding of a 1.2 per cent increase in absolute risk of cancer

over an average of four years needs to be interpreted in view of the estimated 41 per cent lifetime cancer risk.

"The increased cancer occurrence did not result in a significant excess in cancer deaths, although oncogenesis, tumour growth, and treatment failure followed by death is typically a slow process.

"Therefore, with the present trials, it is not possible to make conclusions regarding the effect of ARBs on cancer-related deaths," researchers said.

The first indication of a possible increase in cancer risk with ARBs was noted in the Candesartan in Heart failure Assessment of Reduction in Mortality and

Morbidity programme (CHARM) in 2003.

"This trial reported a significant increase in risk of fatal cancers in patients randomised to candesartan compared with placebo [2.3 per cent vrs 1.6 per cent]," the researchers said.

Further trials including other ARB drugs also noted an increased risk of cancer among patients.

In July last year a detailed briefing document on telmisartan was presented to the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) Cardiovascular and Renal Drugs Advisory Committee, noting excesses in malignancies with telmisartan in two large scale studies.

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Vitamin B6 reduces lung cancer risk: study

Nick O'Donoghue

SMOKERS with above average serum levels of vitamin B6 and methionine have a significantly reduced risk of lung cancer a new study reported.

Published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* the study involved a cohort of more than 500,000 people in 10 countries across Europe.

Researchers noted patients with the highest serum levels of vitamin B6 had a 56 per cent reduced risk of lung cancer compared with those with the lowest, while the higher levels of methionine was associated with a reduced relative risk of 48 per cent.

The relationship between higher serum levels of vitamin B6 and methionine, and risk of lung cancer was similar across smokers, former smokers and those who



VITAMIN B6: Reduces lung cancer risk. never smoked.

"Similar and consistent decreases in risk were observed in never, former, and current smokers, indicating that results were not due to confounding by smoking.

"The magnitude of risk was also constant with increasing length of follow-up, indicating that the associations were not explained by preclinical disease.

"When participants were classified by median levels of serum methionine and B6, having above-median levels of both was associated with a lower lung

cancer risk overall, as well as separately among never, former and current smokers," researchers said.

While the research showed higher than average levels of serum methionine and vitamin B6 were associated with a reduced risk of lung cancer, researchers said it was important to note that a large proportion of cases occur among former smokers, making up the majority in countries where tobacco campaigns have been particularly successful, and a nontrivial number of lung cancer cases occur also among never smokers.

"Clarifying the role of B vitamins and related metabolites in lung cancer risk is likely therefore to be particularly relevant for former smokers and never smokers," researchers said.

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CEOs rough it

MEDICINES Australia chief executive Dr Brendan Shaw will be roughing it tonight on the streets of Canberra as part of the 2010 Vinnies CEO Sleepout.

Dr Shaw will need to rug up warm with temperatures expected to drop to a low of four degrees on a wet night in the capital, to raise money for homeless people around Australia.

Other pharmaceutical industry chief executives John Latham (Pfizer), Jane Orr (MSD) and Jeremy Morgan (Eli Lilly) will rough it in Sydney overnight, where they will face a **forecast** low of 11 degrees and the occasional shower.

To date the 2010 Vinnies CEO Sleepout has raised over \$1 million for the charity, with more than 600 business leaders around the country taking part in tonight's event.

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