Timeliness of Receipt of Manufacturers' New Product Information

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ABSTRACT

In February 1988, the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association of Canada (PMAC) published a Code of Marketing Practices which recommends that PMAC members provide essential product information to drug information centres a minimum of two weeks prior to the marketing of new prescription drugs. A one-year study was undertaken by our Drug Information (DI) Centre to assess the compliance of PMAC companies with this guideline.

Product information was mailed to our DI Centre two weeks or more prior to marketing for only 3/28 (10.7%) new prescription drugs and for none of 27 (0%) new prescription drug dosage forms or strengths. No product information was received for 10/28 (35.7%) new prescription drugs and 21/27 (77.8%) new prescription drug dosage forms or strengths. In several situations, new drugs appeared in journal advertisements or were being detailed to physicians prior to receipt of new product information.

Manufacturers are encouraged to review their procedures for disseminating new product information to ensure that DI centres are notified of new product introductions at least two weeks in advance of detailing or marketing.

Key Words: *drug information, pharmaceutical industry, product information*

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RÉSUMÉ

L'Association canadienne de l'industrie du médicament (A.C.I.M.) publiait en février 1988, un document sur les Règlements de pratique en marketing qui proposait que ses membres fournissent aux centres d'information pharmaceutique les éléments essentiels sur les produits, deux semaines avant la mise en marché de nouveaux médicaments sur prescription. Afin de vérifier la fidélité des compagnies de l'A.C.I.M. envers cette directive, notre centre d'information pharmaceutique (C.I.P.) entreprit une étude qui dura une période d'un an.

De l'information sur le produit fut obtenue par le C.I.P. deux semaines ou plus avant la mise en marché de trois produits sur prescription médicale sur un total de 28 (10,7%) et aucune information fut obtenue sur 27 produits avec des nouvelles forces ou formulations (0%). Aucune information fut reçue pour 10/28 (35,7%) nouveaux médicaments sur prescription et pour 21/27 (77,8%) des médicaments avec des nouvelles forces ou formulations. Dans plusieurs cas, les nouveaux médicaments apparaissaient dans des publications de magazine ou étaient présentés aux médecins avant la réception de l'information sur le produit.

Pour assurer que les C.I.P. soient bien renseignés, deux semaines avant la mise en marché de nouveaux produits, nous encourageons les industries pharmaceutiques, à bien vouloir réviser leurs procédures en ce qui concerne la diffusion d'information sur les nouveaux produits.

Mots clés: *industrie pharmaceutique, information sur les médicaments, information sur les produits*

INTRODUCTION

Drug information (DI) centres are relied upon by many health professionals seeking unbiased, current drug information. A recent survey revealed that Canadian hospital and regional DI centres handle an average of 123 and 218 requests per month, respectively.[1] Our provincial DI Centre answers approximately 2,600 DI questions per month; 8.9% of requests involve new products, i.e., those which have been recently marketed and are not included in the current edition of the *Compendium of Pharmaceuticals and Specialties* or the *Canadian Drug Identification Code.* It is important that our DI Centre be kept informed of new product introductions, because of this large number of requests.

In a 1984 survey conducted by a pharmacy resident in our Centre, 53% of responding pharmaceutical manufacturers claimed to notify DI Centres about new products.[2] In February 1988, the Pharmaceuti-

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cal Manufacturers Association of Canada (PMAC) published a Code of Marketing Practices which states that PMAC members shall mail essential professional product information (e.g., the official product monograph) to all known drug information centres a minimum of two weeks prior to the marketing of new prescription drugs.[3] A study was undertaken at our Drug Information Centre to assess compliance by PMAC companies with this recommendation.

METHODS

The mailing list of Canadian DI centres was obtained from the PMAC office to ensure that our DI Centre was included. This list is supplied by PMAC to its members, upon request.

The study was limited to companies included on the 1988 list of PMAC members.[3] Of the 66 manufacturers, eleven were excluded because they were not recognized as distributing pharmaceutical products in Ontario. New products introduced by the remaining 55 companies were monitored for the period of January 16/89 to January 12/90. Included in the assessment were all new prescription drugs, dosage forms and strengths.

When we became aware of a new product, a standard report form which included the following information was completed: product trade name; dosage form; strength; manufacturer; product category (i.e., new prescription drug, or new prescription drug dosage form or strength); date product information mailed (postmark date); launch date; final assessment and comments. The launch date was stated in the covering letter which accompanied the new product information or it was obtained verbally by telephone from the product manager of the company in question. The final assessment of each new product categorized the timeliness of receipt of product information into one of five groups:

1) postmarked two weeks or more prior to launch date (i.e., satisfies PMAC guideline),
2) postmarked 0-13 days prior to launch date,
3) postmarked within 2 weeks after launch date,
4) postmarked more than two weeks after launch date, or
5) no information received

The total number of (a) new prescription drugs and (b) new prescription drug dosage forms or strengths introduced during the study period was obtained by comparing the January 1989 and January 1990 price lists of each manufacturer.

RESULTS

Of the 55 PMAC companies included in the study, five were eliminated because of the unavailability of January 1989 or January 1990 price lists. By comparing the 1989 and 1990 price lists, we determined that a total of 55 new products were introduced by the remaining 50 companies during the one-year study period. The number of drugs for which we received notification and the number of manufacturers providing information is summarized in Table I. The timeliness of receipt of new product information is summarized in Table II.

Table I: New Product Introductions

	New Prescription Drugs	New Prescription Drug Dosage Forms or Strengths
No. of new product introductions	28	27
No. of manufacturers introducing new drugs	22	19
No. of drug notifications received	18/28	6/27
No. of manufacturers providing information	17/22	4/19

Table II: Timeliness of Receipt of New Product Information

	New Prescription Drugs (n = 28)		New Prescription Drug Dosage Forms or Strengths (n = 27)		Total (n = 55)	
Postmarked two weeks or more prior to launch date (i.e., satisfies PMAC guideline)	3	(10.7%)	0	(0%)	3	(5.5%)
Postmarked 0-13 days prior to launch date	2	(7.1%)	3	(11.1%)	5	(9.1%)
Postmarked within two weeks after launch date	6	(21.4%)	2	(7.4%)	8	(14.5%)
Postmarked more than two weeks after launch date	7	(25%)	1	(3.7%)	8	(14.5%)
No information received	10	(35.7%)	21	(77.8%)	31	(56.4%)

DISCUSSION

In 1984, our DI Centre began work to enhance communication between the pharmaceutical industry and Canadian drug information centres. Using a mailed questionnaire, a pharmacy resident (D. Bruyns) gathered data about drug information literature and educational services provided by manufacturers and the names and phone numbers of persons to contact for drug information in each company. This information was distributed to all known major Canadian DI centres. In exchange, pharmaceutical manufacturers were provided with the names and addresses of Canadian DI centres and encouraged to provide these centres with new product information in a timely manner. A summary of the research project was published to promote further information exchange between these two groups.[2]

One portion of the Bruyns survey requested manufacturers to provide details about the dissemination of new product information. Fifty-three percent of responding manufacturers indicated that they notified drug information centres about new products. Several other groups were informed more frequently: wholesalers — 94%, physicians — 89%, hospital pharmacies — 89% and community pharmacies — 81%. Pharmacists were notified by manufacturers about new products during the month preceeding launch according to 44% of respondents, at the time of marketing by 15%, and within the month following launch by an additional 32%. Subsequent to Bruyns report, PMAC published a Code of Marketing Practices which requires that PMAC members mail essential professional product information to all known drug information centres a minimum of two weeks prior to introducing new prescription drugs.[3]

Our study reveals that few manufacturers are following the PMAC guideline to provide essential product information at least two weeks prior to product launch. Information was mailed two weeks or more prior to marketing for only 3/28 (10.7%) new prescription drugs and 0/27 (0%) new prescription drug dosage forms or strengths (overall total 3/55 = 5.4%). No product information was received for 10/28 (35.7%) new prescription drugs and 21/27 (77.8%) new prescription drug dosage forms or strengths (overall total 31/55 = 56.4%).

Some other interesting observations were noted during the study. 1) Several products were detailed to physicians (and samples were often provided) soon after the Notice of Compliance was granted by the Health Protection Branch, although the product was not officially "launched" until several weeks later. Queries were directed to our Centre shortly after detailing began. Even if companies had adhered to the PMAC guideline of providing information at least two weeks prior to the official launch, this would not have been soon enough because detailing had begun much earlier. 2) For some products, advertisements appeared in medical journals prior to receipt of manufacturer's literature. 3) Occasionally, the official product monograph was not printed by the manufacturer until shortly before or even after the launch date.

Although not officially part of the study, no data on new nonprescription drugs or medical devices was received two weeks or more prior to new product introduction. The PMAC guideline applies only to new prescription drugs; however, information about over-the-counter drugs and health-related devices is also of importance to DI centres.

Informing DI centres prior to new product introduction can be mutually beneficial to DI centres and pharmaceutical manufacturers. DI centres will be confident that they have the most current product availability data and will have time to review the new product information prior to receiving requests. Pharmaceutical manufacturers will be assured that health professionals who use DI centres will receive up-to-date information about their company's products. (DI centres cannot recommend drugs which are unknown to them or which they assume have not yet been marketed). Proactive efforts to inform DI centres about new products potentially could reduce the number of requests directed to manufacturers by DI centres. In addition, DI centres can assist pharmaceutical manufacturers in disseminating new product information through newsletters and related publications.

In spite of these mutual benefits and PMAC guidelines, our study confirms that DI centres cannot yet rely on manufacturers to provide timely notification about new product introductions. In fact, in our DI Centre, we are commonly informed about new products through four other sources:

a) wholesaler price lists,
b) advertisements or new product listings in trade magazines (e.g. *Drug Merchandising*), medical journals, and newsletters from other DI centres,
c) community pharmacists contacting the Centre because of receipt of a prescription for a new drug (we then must contact the manufacturer to determine if the drug has been released),
d) community pharmacists who contact the Centre because of receipt of an automatic shipment of a new drug without any

accompanying product information.

Based on the results of this survey, we recommend that manufacturers examine their procedures for disseminating new product information. Steps should be taken to ensure that drug information centres are informed about new products a minimum of two weeks prior to marketing, in accordance with the PMAC guideline. If the final draft of the official product monograph is not available two weeks in advance of marketing, manufacturers should at least provide an announcement of the marketing date and some basic drug information (e.g., trade name, generic name, dosage form, strength, package size and indications, along with reprints of selected articles or a reference list). A copy of the product monograph should follow, when available. If detailing of the product, distribution of samples or advertising begins earlier than the launch date, DI centres should be notified prior to initiation of these activities.

In addition to announcements about new prescription drugs, dosage forms and strengths, advance notification about new nonprescription drugs and medical devices would be welcomed by DI centres. Although our study was limited to manufacturers which are members of PMAC, all pharmaceutical companies are encouraged to provide DI centres with advance notice of new product introductions.

If manufacturers are unaware of the location of Canadian DI centres, a list can be obtained from the PMAC office or from the Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists (CSHP). In the spring of each year, the Executive Director of CSHP forwards a list of the major Canadian DI centres to the medical department of each PMAC company and to the members of Canadian Drug Manufacturers' Association.

The results of this survey were presented at the December 1990 Annual Meeting of the PMAC Medical Information Group (MIG), a special interest group of PMAC composed of medical information providers. Their assistance was requested to help rectify the problems identified by this study. At the suggestion of the PMAC MIG, the study results will be forwarded to the PMAC office and to the chief executive officer of each PMAC company.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that few manufacturers are complying with the PMAC guideline to provide DI Centres with advance notice of new product introductions. Steps are being taken to remedy the situation.

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