

5 October 2011 | Media release | Pharmacy Guild of Australia

Gold Cross endorsement of Blackmores Companions range withdrawn

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia and Blackmores have agreed that the Gold Cross endorsement of the Blackmores Companions range of complementary medicines will be withdrawn.

The mutual decision has been taken in view of the strong level of public concern about the proposal, based on some media reporting of the endorsement which was ill-informed and inflammatory.

The last thing the Guild would ever want to do is deplete the credibility of community pharmacists, or damage the trust in which they are held by Australians. That trust and confidence is of paramount importance to the Guild and to our Members.

The Gold Cross endorsement arrangement with Blackmores was entered in good faith, with absolutely no intention of undermining the professionalism and integrity of participating pharmacists. There is not now and never would be any direction from the Guild for pharmacists to be involved in unprofessional, unethical or clinically unsound conduct. The idea that community pharmacists would take part in commercial "upselling" without regard to their professional standards is offensive to our profession and rejected by the Guild.

However, perceptions are very important, and it is overwhelmingly clear that the public perception of this endorsement was damaging to the reputation of community pharmacy. Both the public, and sections of the broader pharmacy industry expressed strong concerns about the proposal.

The Guild has listened to these concerns and accepts - mutually with Blackmores - that the best course in all the circumstances is to withdraw the endorsement arrangement. The Guild regrets any damage done to the image of community pharmacy and will do everything possible to ensure the public maintain their trust in community pharmacists as the custodians of medicines and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

The National President of the Guild, Kos Sclavos, said: "We entered this arrangement in good faith, but we have now agreed with Blackmores that the furore that has been created is doing damage, and must be dealt with before it further damages community pharmacists and the patients they serve. The only alternative is to cancel the endorsement, and this has been done. I add my personal

apologies for any distress this has caused to pharmacists."

Gold Cross, a fully owned subsidiary of the Guild, had agreed to endorse a range of Blackmores products, which meant that the range of four Companions products would have the Guild's Gold Cross on their packaging.

Additionally, an optional prompt containing clinical information for the patient to consider in relation to one product of the Companions range was to be available through the dispensary IT programs, on a pilot basis. The software pilot was not intended to commence until at least November, and will now not proceed.

Blackmores products are well-established, and marketed by one of the best known and respected names in evidence-based complementary medicine. Many doctors, pharmacists and other health professionals make recommendations for these types of products frequently.

Blackmores developed this range of four to be available exclusively through pharmacies so that consumers would always obtain the appropriate information and advice.

Contrary to some media reports, there was never any compulsion whatsoever on pharmacists to sell these products, nor was there any direct incentive to any pharmacist to sell them. At all times, community pharmacists would continue to be free - and indeed expected - to exercise their professional and clinical judgement in relation to these products.

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