

## Attitudes of Health Professionals towards a Drug Bulletin — S Ismail, P Jeram, S Cole



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### Curriculum vitae

Shenaaz Ismail matriculated in 1986 at Trafalgar High School in Cape Town and is currently a 4th year pharmacy student at UCT. After graduation she would like to pursue her career by completing her internship in retail or industrial pharmacy. She has worked in the Medicines Information Centre during her vacations and has assisted the Centre with various projects.

Prashant Jeram matriculated in 1987 at Rosebank House College in Cape Town. When he graduates in December 1991 he intends to complete his training by becoming an intern in hospital pharmacy. He has worked in the Medicines Information Centre during his vacations and has assisted the Centre with various projects.

Mrs Susan Cole is the Principal Scientific Officer in the Medicines Information Centre, Department of Pharmacology, University of Cape Town. She received a BA (Unisa) in 1974 and is involved in the administration of the information service and the research of the Centre. She is co-editor of the bulletin *Informed* (previously called *Drug Safety News*)

### Summary

*The bulletin of the Medicines Information Centre, Drug Safety News, has been in existence since January 1981. As Drug Safety News (now called Infor-med) enters this new decade, a new image is emerging. A questionnaire was drawn up and was included in the bulletin to evaluate the subscribers' response to changes in the bulletin. Of the 655 questionnaires sent to doctors, pharmacists and academics, 121 completed questionnaires were received. After having analysed the responses to the questionnaire it was established that a short informative bulletin containing information on the therapeutic use of drugs, adverse drug reactions and drug interactions is widely read and well received by the health profession.*

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### KEYWORDS:

Publishing; Drug Evaluation; Questionnaires; Research.

### Introduction

The Medicines Information Centre (MIC) is an independent, neutral body within the Dept of Pharmacology of the University of Cape Town. It is a Section 21 Company (non profit-making) and was established in 1980 as the UCT: Ciba Geigy Medicines Safety Centre. Until 1989 the Centre was funded by Ciba-Geigy (Pty) Ltd. At present the Medicines Information Centre is funded jointly by 21 companies within the pharmaceutical industry.

The function of the centre is to research and provide information and expert assistance on all matters

pertaining to the rational usage of medicines in southern Africa, thereby promoting the health of all its people.

Its aims include:

- Monitoring and collecting adverse drug reactions (ADRs)
- Promoting the rational usage of medicines
- Providing advice on ADRs, therapeutics, pharmacokinetics, dosage regimens and clinical problems
- Conducting pharmaco-epidemiological research.

Every quarter since January 1981 the Centre has circulated a bulletin, *Drug Safety News*, to doctors, dentists and pharmacists in the Western Cape. The format has remained virtually unchanged through the years, and the theme of an adverse drug reaction bulletin has remained constant. In 1988 cosmetic changes were made to the bulletin; the size was increased to A4, the new logo was introduced and the therapeutic sheet incorporated into the text of the bulletin.

As *Drug Safety News* enters this new decade a new image is emerging. Adverse drug reaction reports are still evident, however, the bad news (adverse drug reactions) will be tempered by good news, in the form of practical therapeutic contributions. One of the basic aims of the editorial function will be to produce comparative information on the benefit/risk ratio of drug treatment.

The expense of publishing continues to increase and expanding the distribution nationwide would be beyond the limited resources of the Centre. However, 11 500 readers

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could be reached, as opposed to the present 2 000, by incorporating the bulletin in a well-known national journal. Since the bulletin is published for its readers it should contain the information they require. It is for this reason that a questionnaire was drawn up to assess and evaluate the requirements and opinions of readers towards changes in the bulletin.

## Subjects and methods

A simple questionnaire with a business reply-paid envelope was included in the October 1990 issue of the bulletin. Subscribers were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed envelope.

The questionnaire comprised eleven questions which had to be answered on a scale of 1 to 5 ranging from completely dissatisfied to completely satisfied. The subscriber was asked to encircle a number on the dissatisfied/satisfied scale. The format of the questionnaire also included a section for suggestions by the subscriber. Of the 655 questionnaires distributed, 121 completed questionnaires and 5 incompletely filled in questionnaires were received. The completed questionnaires were received mainly from doctors, pharmacists and academics.

## Analysis of responses

The questionnaires received were analysed and a histogram was plotted by extrapolating the data from the 1-5 scale. The numerical scale of 1-5 was divided into 3 sections, where the numerical values of 1 & 2 which represented "completely dissatisfied" were assigned a NO, and 4 & 5 which represented "completely

satisfied" were assigned a YES. The value of 3 being at the centre of the scale was assigned a MAYBE.

## Questions and results

1. Is the information contained in the bulletin of use to you?

<i>Yes</i>	73,8%
<i>No</i>	0,8%
<i>Maybe</i>	14,3%
<i>Unanswered</i>	11,1%

The majority of subscribers said that the information contained in the bulletin was of use to them.

2. Do you require more information on therapeutics?

<i>Yes</i>	61,1%
<i>No</i>	11,1%
<i>Maybe</i>	19,0%
<i>Unanswered</i>	8,8%

Most subscribers felt that more information on therapeutics was required.

3. Do you require more information on selected drugs?

<i>Yes</i>	61,9%
<i>No</i>	9,5%
<i>Maybe</i>	22,2%
<i>Unanswered</i>	6,4%

A significant proportion of subscribers required more information on selected drugs.

4. Would you be interested in comments from the pharmaceutical industry?

<i>Yes</i>	46,0%
<i>No</i>	26,2%
<i>Maybe</i>	23,0%
<i>Unanswered</i>	4,8%

Subscribers were divided as to whether the bulletin should contain comments from the pharmaceutical industry.

5. Would you be interested in comments from local experts?

<i>Yes</i>	69,8%
<i>No</i>	8,7%
<i>Maybe</i>	15,9%
<i>Unanswered</i>	5,6%

Comments from local experts would be welcomed by most subscribers.

6. Would you be prepared to submit articles for publication?

<i>Yes</i>	13,5%
<i>No</i>	59,5%
<i>Maybe</i>	15,1%
<i>Unanswered</i>	11,9%

Most subscribers were reluctant to submit articles for publication in the bulletin.

7. Would you be interested in receiving the bulletin bi-monthly?

<i>Yes</i>	48,4%
<i>No</i>	20,6%
<i>Maybe</i>	21,4%
<i>Unanswered</i>	9,6%

8. Would you be interested in receiving the bulletin monthly?

<i>Yes</i>	56,3%
<i>No</i>	19,8%
<i>Maybe</i>	15,1%
<i>Unanswered</i>	8,8%

Subscribers preferred a monthly issue of the bulletin although a significant percentage of subscribers were unsure about the bi-monthly issue.



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9. Would you be interested in subscribing to the bulletin?

<i>Yes</i>	55,6%
<i>No</i>	15,9%
<i>Maybe</i>	19,0%
<i>Unanswered</i>	9,5%

Subscription to the bulletin was favoured.

10. Would you prefer to see the bulletin as part of a national journal?

<i>Yes</i>	34,1%
<i>No</i>	48,4%
<i>Maybe</i>	8,7%
<i>Unanswered</i>	8,8%

11. Would you subscribe to such a journal rather than to the bulletin?

<i>Yes</i>	23,0%
<i>No</i>	44,4%
<i>Maybe</i>	19,0%
<i>Unanswered</i>	13,6%

Subscribers rejected both the idea of the bulletin being part of a national journal, and the idea of subscribing to a journal rather than to a bulletin.

### Discussion

After analysing the completed questionnaires in order to plot a histogram, the suggestions made by subscribers were evaluated. The majority of subscribers were satisfied with the content of the bulletin as it is short, informative and easy to read. There were, however, a number of subscribers who thought that more emphasis should be placed on therapeutics. Suggestions included: Therapeutic Tips/Hints from local experts, and simple diagrams in the

therapeutic sheet eg reflecting mechanisms of action of a drug on a receptor such as Digoxin on ATPase. A number of subscribers felt that comparative articles on classes of drugs and their effectiveness would be of immense value to them. There was also a suggestion that the entire bulletin should occasionally discuss or review one topic or one particular drug group eg benzodiazepines, treatment of gout, asthma, arrhythmias or hypercholesterolaemia.

From the suggestions evaluated it was evident that the format of the bulletin was favoured by the subscribers. One of its main advantages is that it consists of a few pages, which makes it easy to read and file. Subscribers felt that journals tend to lie around, are difficult to file and retrieve, and not even opened. Many subscribers, however, did recommend that "Prescribers points to ponder" should be alone on a single (double-sided) page for easy filing and regular updating. There was an appeal by veterinarians for more information in their particular field.

The majority of subscribers criticised the structure of the questionnaire and thought that it required a YES/NO answer rather than a numerical satisfaction index.

### Conclusion

The survey established that a short, informative bulletin containing information on the therapeutic use of drugs, adverse drug reactions and drug interactions is widely read and well received by the health profession.