

# Wholesale Bulletin



## UniChem to take over supply of Astellas transplant drugs

Astellas UK has announced plans to switch the distribution of its transplant medicines Prograf and Advagraf to a single supplier - Alliance Boots' unit UniChem - as of the end of this month.

Plans for a radical switch to a single medicines distribution channel first came to the fore in September 2006, when Pfizer shocked the industry with its announcement that UniChem would be solely responsible for the supply of its medicines in the UK. The group claims the modification will secure the supply chain for its medicines and reduce the risk of counterfeit medicines, a growing problem in the UK. Since then, several companies have admitted

reassessing their own distribution arrangements (although many will likely be awaiting the outcome of an ongoing 'market study' by the Office of Fair Trading into medicines distribution in the UK), and just last month AstraZeneca announced that its modified supply and delivery service, under which it will use just two partners to deliver its medicines directly to customers, will go live from the beginning of February next year

But Astellas insists that its move is not an indication that it plans to follow in the footsteps of Pfizer by switching all of its medicines to a single distributor, claiming instead that, in this case, the change was a reaction to reports by UK

pharmacists of difficulties in obtaining Prograf (tacrolimus) and the newer once-daily version Advagraf from their wholesalers.

"Fourteen thousand patients need Prograf in the UK, and we supply 30% more than patients require. But we've been receiving lots of complaints that pharmacists can't get hold of the drug," a spokesman said "It's difficult to say what's happening," he went to say, but suggested that wholesalers might be selling a large proportion of the supply abroad, which they are entitled to do.

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### Special points of interest:

- *This bulletin is free to interested wholesaler employees*
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## WALES TACKLES PUBLIC HEALTH

Action is needed in Wales to tackle public health issues such as obesity, smoking and binge drinking, areas in which pharmacy could play a role. A report from the Welsh Assembly Government's chief medical officer, Dr Tony Jewell, found that although overall health was improving there, these specific issues still needed to be addressed.

Peter Jones, chairman of the Welsh Pharmacy Board, said raising awareness of the role pharmacists could play in smoking cessation was a priority for the board. Mr Jones also welcomed news that the government in Wales had promised an extra £1.2 billion to the health service over the next three years.



## OIL HIKE COULD TRIGGER EXTRA DELIVERY CHARGES

Spiralling oil prices could result in pharmacists paying more for drugs deliveries, the British Association of Pharmaceutical Wholesalers has warned.

Oil prices have jumped 40 per cent since January, with the price of petrol passing the £1 a litre mark for the first time last month.

Wholesalers could struggle to absorb these ever increasing costs, claimed Martin Sawer, executive director at the BAPW.

He said: "We raised the issue of rising oil prices with the Department of Health in 2005 at the time of the last oil price hike. They said they understood our concerns but that for the moment it would have to be regulated by market forces. If manufacturers continue to make the marketplace uncompetitive, it's most likely that wholesalers will have to pass the costs on to pharmacy." UniChem said it will lobby the government over concerns about increasing oil

prices, according to 'Managing Director Terry Scicluna'

"The recent increase in fuel prices clearly has an adverse effect upon an industry that already operates to extremely tight profit margins."

A DH spokesperson responded: "We obviously have no jurisdiction over the price of petrol, and it's not a pharmacy-specific issue

## Stricter Licensing To Combat Counterfeits

Britain's leading parallel importers have called for stricter licensing controls and tougher self-regulation to remedy a spate of counterfeit drug discoveries this summer.

Richard Freudenberg, secretary general of the British Association of European Pharmaceutical Distributors, told C+D that only licensed importers should be able to deal with parallel imports.

Mr Freudenberg also suggested that PI firms could self-regulate by carrying out audits of their own supply companies.

"It will eliminate traders in the market - those people only interested in making a quick buck. Or, in the case of wholesalers, if they want to continue in parallel trade they will have to invest in licenses or acquire a PI company."

The comments follow the discoveries of counterfeit Zyprexa, Plavix and Casodex earlier this year. All three entered the supply chain through parallel import.

The MHRA was due to host a summit on combating counterfeit medicines this Thursday.

Mr Freudenberg said: "We've talked to the MHRA about all of these ideas. Whether they'll factor them into their announcements on Thursday, we don't know."

### New subscribers

WaveData have kindly agreed to give 100 credits for their wave-data.net live pricing information site to anyone passing on the names of colleagues who have agreed it would be interesting to receive this wholesale bulletin each month.

### Merry Christmas

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a merry Christmas and a very happy 2008.



### Lambeth GPs use text messaging to boost flu jabs

Nine GP surgeries in Lambeth, South London have been using text message invitations to patients for their annual flu immunisation. Supported by Lambeth Primary Care Trust, the initiative aims to increase immunisation rates amongst "at risk" patients whilst streamlining service delivery. Both the elderly and patients with chronic conditions, who are particularly susceptible to the flu during the winter months, are invited for free vaccinations via text message from their GP surgeries.

