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Verona, the 26th of April 2006

**Object : "Direct-to-Consumer Advertising of Prescription Drugs in New Zealand" -
Contribution by the *International Society of Drug Bulletins***

Dear Minister,

The International Society of Drug Bulletins (ISDB) is a worldwide network of bulletins and journals on drugs and therapeutics that are financially and intellectually independent of pharmaceutical industry. It was founded in 1986.

ISDB appreciates the openness of the debate in New Zealand, and wishes to make a contribution.

The International Society of Drug Bulletins has about 50 members in more than 30 countries around the world. See www.ISDBweb.org for details.

Willingness to be independent from pharmaceutical firms is not a matter of ideology, but a pragmatic choice: experience worldwide shows that the quality of the information is closely linked to editorial independence. And the only way to achieve editorial independence is to be financially independent from industry funding.

ISDB considers that citizens must be provided with reliable and comparative information on treatments by public health authorities, healthcare professionals and independent patient and consumer organizations. That, DTCA cannot achieve by definition, being aimed at selling drugs.

Topics of particular interest to ISDB are: access to information about medicines, including access to unpublished data, and the impact of undue promotion by the pharmaceutical industry.

That is why we are carefully following the debate on direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) currently taking place in New Zealand.



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The Vioxx[®] (rofecoxib) affair and its withdrawal for cardiac adverse effects, showed that promotion has a detrimental impact on drug prescription and consumption. Other examples for DTCA driven inappropriate use include psychotropics and antibiotics. An increasing number of voices in the United States are being raised against DTCA, the negative consequences of which are preventable deaths, such as those due to the Vioxx[®]. Closely linked to DTCA, disease mongering tends to increase irrational drug consumption.

The European Commission's Enterprise Directorate recently tried to re-introduce DTCA and disease mongering under the guise of "public information" provided by drug companies. Despite the fact that the European Council of Health Ministers followed the EU parliament's lead in 2004 and reaffirmed the prohibition of all direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs (with the exception of vaccines, as before) the European Commission's Enterprise Directorate seem to wish, in 2006 again, to allow drug companies to inform the public directly.

Our European members are worried about this issue and ISDB is determined to ensure that DTCA remained prohibited in Europe, thereby helping to protect people from the risks of inappropriate treatment and unnecessary consumption of medicines.

ISDB thinks that New Zealand health authorities would act in the interests of patients worldwide by banning DTCA for prescription drugs.

The ongoing debate in New Zealand is all the more important, and the decisions that will be taken in your country will have repercussions around the globe.

With our best regards

Maria Font
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Florence Vandeveld
ISDB General Secretary representative

Jörg Schaaber
ISDB treasurer

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