

US pharmacy chain tracks customer's use of herbals

A large US pharmacy chain is tracking herbal supplements and nonprescription remedies bought by its customers in order to warn them of potential interactions with prescribed drugs. Under its voluntary-disclosure program, CVS Corporation (www.corporate-ir.net/ireye/ir_site.zhtml?ticker=cvs&script=410&layout=7&item_id=69847) of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, asks cus-

tomers to fill out a form listing all non-prescription medications and nutritional supplements they take. The information is entered into a confidential patient profile that generates a warning of possible interactions on the monograph supplied with each prescription.

"We are deeply concerned that increased use of vitamin and herbal thera-

pies can lead to an increased chance of potentially dangerous drug interactions," says Chris Bodine, CVS's senior vice president for pharmacy.

One example of a potentially problematic herb is St. John's wort, which is widely used to treat depression, anxiety, dermatologic conditions and bladder problems. However, Bodine said it can also inhibit the effectiveness of some heart medications.

CVS Corp. is the largest drug store chain in the US, with more than 4100 stores. The corporation's own research suggests that almost 40% of Americans do not advise their doctors when they self-medicate with herbal remedies. CVS encourages customers to inform both their pharmacists and physicians when they take dietary supplements or over-the-counter drugs.

The new warning system is available in all of the company's pharmacies, as well as at its Web site, www.cvs.com. The company has bought television air time and newspaper advertisements to promote the service. "We are the only major pharmacy in America to offer it, and thus far the program has been very well received by our customers," Bodine said. — *David Helwig*, London, Ont.

New CMA guide to herbal remedies now on market

A long-awaited guide to herbal remedies produced by the CMA and the Canadian Pharmacists Association is now available. The easy-to-use reference book, *Herbs: Everyday Reference for Health Professionals*, features about 60 herbal remedies. It was written and reviewed by the top experts in the field of herbal medicine in Canada and is designed to help physicians answer their patients' questions.

Dr. Linda Rapson, chair of the Ontario Medical Association's Complementary Medicine Section, says the new book is "a must for family docs. The format allows for quick reference to toxicology, contraindications, adverse effects and interactions, all matters of great concern, particularly to prescribing physicians."

Dr. Frank Chandler, the chair of Health Canada's Therapeutics Products Program Advisory Panel on Natural Health Products and the former director of pharmacy at Dalhousie University, is the book's editor-in-chief and chair of its Editorial Advisory Committee.

The book, which costs \$39.95 for CMA members and \$49.95 for non-members, is available by phoning 888 855-2555.

