

## FOR THE RECORD

## Tainted weight-loss products

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has expanded its list of tainted, over-the-counter weight-loss products that consumers should not purchase or consume because they contain undeclared and unapproved “active pharmaceutical ingredients.”

The FDA list of illegal products now tallies 72 ([www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/weight\\_loss\\_products.htm](http://www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/weight_loss_products.htm)).

Among weight-loss products added to the FDA’s outlaw list were Herbal Xenicol, Slimbionic and Xsvelten. Among new undeclared drug ingredients that were discovered in weight-loss products and added to the list in late March were:

- fenproporex, an amphetamine derivative whose side effects can include tachycardia, blurred vision, uncontrollable movements and even sudden death;

- fluoxetine, a member of the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor class, which must be labelled as increasing the risk of suicide and suicidal thinking in children;
- furosemide, a prescription diuretic used for the treatment of congestive heart failure, high blood pressure and edema, which is known to have such side effects as severe dehydration;
- cetelistat, an experimental obesity drug now in clinical trials, which has demonstrated such adverse reactions as “fecal incontinence, rectal discharge, and defecation urgency.”

“These tainted weight-loss products pose a great risk to public health because they contain undeclared ingredients and, in some cases, contain prescription drugs in amounts that greatly exceed maximum recommended dosages,” stated Dr. Janet Woodcock, director of the FDA’s

Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, in a press release announcing the additions.

“Consumers have no way of knowing that these products contain dangerous drugs that could cause serious consequences to their health.”

The FDA indicated it has sought recalls of the illegal products and “may” pursue additional measures, including criminal charges.

Health Canada has issued warnings for 6 weight-loss products ([www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/med/weight-amaigr-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/med/weight-amaigr-eng.php)).

Although many have called for legislation subjecting weight-loss products to regulatory approval, including *CMAJ*, there have been no signs that the government will move in that direction (*CMAJ* 2009;180[4]:367). — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

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## Briefly

**Just like books:** Arguing that customers who use Amazon.com or iTunes have better access to comparative measures than patients, United Kingdom Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced that the UK’s National Health Service will roll out online rating of general practitioners on the NHS Choices website this summer. The “principle of valuing the opinions and views of others applies in the decisions we make around our health and care as well,” Brown stated in “*Working Together – Public Services On Your Side*,” the government’s “vision” for government services to help create a “richer, fairer and safer society,” ([www.hmg.gov.uk/workingtogether.aspx](http://www.hmg.gov.uk/workingtogether.aspx)). As part of the initiative, Brown also established a Prime Minister’s Commission on the Future of Nursing and Midwifery. It will look at “freeing up nurses and midwives to lead improvements on the front line.”

**Earnings:** Fee-for-service payments to Canadian physicians rose 4.7% in 2006/07, with the average family physician grossing \$216 575, the average medical specialist \$262 429 and the average surgical specialist \$362 878, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information. Psychiatrists trailed the pack at \$184 088, while ophthalmology surgeons led it, grossing an average \$514 562 ([www.cihi.ca](http://www.cihi.ca)).

**Trans fat:** British Columbia will become the first province to restrict trans fat in health care institutions, hospital cafeterias, restaurants and other food service establishments. Minister of Healthy Living and Sport Mary Polak announced in March that effective Sept. 30, the trans fat content of oils and spreadable margarines will be limited to 2% of total fat, while that of all other foods will be restricted to 5% of any food served in such venues.

**Health snoops:** United Kingdom Secretary of State for Health Alan Johnson says the government should recruit snoops within communities to badger smokers, drinkers and heavy eaters into making healthier lifestyle choices. Messages from peers are often more effective, Johnson stated in a speech to the Royal Society of Arts in March ([www.dh.gov.uk/en/News/Speeches/DH\\_096547](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/News/Speeches/DH_096547)). “That is why we must also look at mentoring schemes, such as health trainer schemes, where primary care trusts recruit people from disadvantaged communities to give health advice to people in those communities setting goals on reducing smoking and increasing physical activity.” — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*



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