

Governance, stewardship and cosmetics

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Clinical governance is a central facet of modern medicine. Although the purist will delight in explaining the elements of the process, in essence governance means to do or strive to do what is best for the individual patient. There is an accepted obligation to raise issues of concern through well-defined pathways without fear or prejudice.

Unfortunately, society has become used to poor governance in other fields; banking and the financial sector come to mind.

Are there issues with governance in the cosmetics industry? Consumer safety ought to be the key in their governance but is it always the prime concern?

The consequences resulting from use of methylisothiazolinone at 100 ppm in all types of cosmetic products will be with us for some time. The causes of the catastrophe are well-recorded in this journal. What is becoming evident is that some risk assessors within the relevant industry advised against using the preservative in some product types. As is common practice, trade associations speak with a single voice and the cries of those who warn may be drowned and never heard.

Allegedly, clinicians involved in an industry-sponsored study on repeated application of methylisothiazolinone-containing cosmetic products in methylisothiazolinone-sensitive individuals were denied permission to publish the results. The reason for the denial: a negative impact on the marketing of the preservative. We are all aware of similar appalling situations in the pharmaceuticals sector and where profound and fully justified criticism has led to major reforms in governance within this industry. All appropriate information, good and bad, must be made available.

The cosmetics industry is now worried that the list of permitted and useful preservatives in their palette is becoming increasingly restricted. Methyltribromo glutaronitrile was phased out from cosmetics as there was a

failure to properly consider sensitisation as the toxicological endpoint of concern. Over nearly three decades the use of methylchloroisothiazolinone / methylisothiazolinone in cosmetics has been trimmed both in concentration limits and product types. Paraben-esters are being withdrawn due to media/consumer pressure rather than informed scientific debate. Quaternium-15 may go due to a non-dermatological safety issue; this and other formaldehyde-releasing preservatives have received bad press in the USA where one cosmetics company has stated that it will totally stop using them. It is of enormous concern that these and other preservatives may be present in a wide range of other consumer and industrial products, possibly without concentration limits or labelling.

Resistance to antibiotics is (largely) the results of poor stewardship by both clinicians and those marketing the drugs. In other words, misuse (including overuse) of antibiotics is now denying their benefits to mankind. Belatedly, guidelines and monitoring use of antibiotics is now accepted practice in healthcare provision; the lessons have been learned. We have seen that the manufacturers/suppliers of preservatives cannot be relied upon to provide unbiased advice; it is not their responsibility to police use of their products. Stewardship of the use of preservatives in cosmetics and other products must develop.

The long term experience has been an apparent unwillingness of the cosmetics industry to live up to the standards that are now accepted as the norm. The cosmetics industry must accept the need for open governance and promote stewardship. If this is not introduced rapidly, a regulatory framework concerning the obligations of industry including the terms and conditions under which they need to collaborate with physicians is needed.

It is no good crying over spilled milk.

The Editors