AWTORITÀ DWAR IL-MEDIĊINI

30th September 2011

Circular No. P09/2011

Dear Healthcare Professional,

Re: European Medicines Agency confirms positive benefit-risk balance for Champix with the benefits of smoking cessation outweighing slight reported increase in cardiovascular events

The European Medicines Agency has confirmed that the benefit-risk balance for Champix (varenicline) remains positive, despite the results of a recent meta-analysis[1] of the medicine's side effects affecting cardiovascular safety.

Champix has been authorised in the European Union for the cessation of smoking in adults since September 2006. It is marketed and used extensively in many European countries including Malta. Its product information already includes information on cardiovascular side effects. The meta-analysis[1], published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* on Monday 4 July, looked at the number of cardiovascular events seen in a total of 8,216 people taking either Champix or placebo in 14 randomised clinical trials lasting up to a year. The events included heart attack, stroke, disruption of the heart rhythm, heart failure and death related to cardiovascular problems. The largest of the studies included over 700 patients with pre-existing cardiovascular disease.

The meta-analysis found that events were rare in both groups, but that there was a slightly increased number in the people taking Champix: 1.06% of those taking Champix had an event (52 out of 4,908) compared with 0.82% of those taking placebo (27 out of 3,308). This did not result in a difference in death rates between the two groups.

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The Committee identified a number of limitations of the meta-analysis, including the low number of events seen, the types of events counted, the higher drop-out rates in people receiving placebo, the lack of information on the timing of events, and the exclusion of studies in which no-one had an event. Because of these limitations, the Committee could not draw robust conclusions from the meta-analysis. The Agency's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) and Pharmacovigilance Working Party concluded that the slightly increased risk of cardiovascular events reported by the study's authors does not outweigh the benefits of Champix in helping people to stop smoking. The Committee has asked Pfizer, the marketing-authorisation holder for Champix, to submit a variation to include more information on cardiovascular events in the medicine's product information.

Healthcare professionals are encouraged to maintain vigilance on Champix. Suspected adverse drug reactions may be reported using the Medicines Authority yellow card scheme or online at http://www.medicinesauthority.gov.mt/pub/adr.doc or to the local MAH representatives. The Medicines Authority has participated in the discussions held at the EMA and is in agreement with the full **press release** issued by the EMA, attached here for your perusal.

References

1. Singh S *et al.* 2011 Risk of serious adverse cardiovascular events associated with varenicline: a systematic review and meta-analysis. CMAJ July 4, 2011. doi: 10.1503/cmaj.110218. Available at: http://www.cmaj.ca/content/early/2011/07/04/cmaj.110218.

Healthcare professionals are encouraged to regularly check the Medicines Authority website for product safety updates as these are issued on an ongoing basis

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