

# Part and parcel of change

**C**ommunity pharmacists should be smiling soon. According to this week's **Agenda for 2004** (p508) the one product that they would most like to be available as a pharmacy medicine is chloramphenicol eye-drops and, next week, their dreams will start to come true. *The Journal* understands an application for switching the status of chloramphenicol eye-drops from prescription-only medicine to pharmacy medicine is to be made to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. This will set the wheels in motion that will end, probably early next year, with pharmacists being able to sell the product over the counter.

Switching the status of medicines from POM to P has changed over the past 12 months or so with the introduction of a new process in 2002 to make more medicines available to patients more quickly. Before that, switching involved a legislative change, whereas now, in simple terms, once the Committee on Safety of Medicines has recommended that a change can be made, it is done on the order of the Secretary of State for Health.

## Rumours started: the Government had been frightened off by the *Daily Mail*

Omeprazole is the latest prescription-only medicine to follow this path. After the application was made, the MHRA opened a consultation period on 16 May 2003, closing it on 27 June. Nothing then happened in public, although marketeers at GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare were beavering away behind closed doors preparing for launching OTC omeprazole as Zanprol. The switched licence authorisation was formally made on 19 January this year, and the process completed with the launch of Zanprol on 16 March.

Just before Easter, *The Journal* understood that the switch of simvastatin was to be formally announced this week following the completion of the MHRA consultation in mid-January: at the very least, the Secretary of State was going to make the announcement in a north London pharmacy. The *Daily Mail* had the same understanding over the timing, and ran a negative story about it on Monday. The expected announcement was not made. Rumours started: the Government had been frightened off by the *Daily Mail*, whose readers include the wives of precisely the group the Government and manufacturers hope will buy simvastatin OTC.

*The Journal* understands that the CSM has recommended that the switch from Zocor (POM) to Zocor Heart-Pro (P) can be made. When the Secretary of State applies the rubber stamp (if he has not already done so), and MSD/Johnson & Johnson decide to launch it, could be at any time.

Pharmacists will be divided over whether this is a good or a bad thing, but *The Journal* believes it is going to happen. This week's **Agenda for 2004** points out that switches are all part and parcel of the changes facing pharmacists and they should be welcomed as a tool for ensuring that pharmacists' skills are used to the full.

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