



MEDIA RELEASE

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PAGB response to *Radio 4* programme on salicylate containing topical warming sprays and gels

John Smith, PAGB Chief Executive, comments: “Topical products containing salicylates have been marketed for several decades and the risk-benefit ratio of their safety and efficacy is widely accepted. Warming sprays and gels containing salicylate work by warming aching, injured and sore muscles. These products are absorbed into the skin where they are metabolised into salicylic acid¹ – a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID).

“Salicylates work by disrupting the signals concerned with the perception of pain². Methyl salicylate also increases cutaneous blood flow and has a localised analgesic action.

“It’s important to note that in the updated Cochrane review, only three studies used methyl salicylate. Moreover, the studies concerned products only at concentrations from 0.1% to 2.6%, and the concentration of other salicylates did not exceed 10%. Some OTC products contain methyl salicylate at 5.0% and a total salicylates concentration of 11.0%.

“Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are indicated for the treatment of mild to moderate painful conditions of soft tissues such as muscles and joints. Application to patients with more severe painful conditions, such as those described in some of the studies in the Cochrane review, is not a reasonable method of evaluating efficacy of OTC products. In addition, several studies used patients with acute conditions, which is not recommended as an indication in topical warming products.

“A wide range of OTC pain relieving products are available to buy from pharmacies and other retail outlets. This ensures people are able to choose a medicine which best suits their needs and particular ailment. For many, topical warming products provide an efficacious alternative to oral analgesics.

“As with all medicines, these products should be used in accordance with the clear on-pack instruction and patient information leaflet. Anyone who has concerns about taking a medicine should speak to a pharmacist for advice. Pharmacists are highly trained healthcare professionals and can provide useful information on over-the-counter medicines and treatments.”

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Notes to editors:

PAGB defines Self Care as the actions people take for themselves and their families to promote and maintain good health and wellbeing and to take care of their self-treatable conditions.

PAGB, the consumer healthcare association, represents the manufacturers of branded OTC medicines, self care medical devices and food supplements in the UK.

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¹ Cross et al, Lancet 1997

² Altman et al, postgrad. Med 2009