

MEDIA STATEMENT



8 December 2014

RESPONSE TO CONSUMER MAGAZINE ARTICLE ABOUT GLUCOSAMINE / PROBIOTICS

Extract from article: The European Food Safety Authority, which approves health claims that can be used in the EU, hasn't given the green light to claims for glucosamine or chondroitin. On the basis of the evidence assessed for joint health, the authority found a relationship hadn't been established between taking the supplements and beneficial outcomes for the general population.

NPNZ's response:

Natural Products NZ was surprised at the EU Food Safety Authority's refusal to allow claims about glucosamine and chondroitin because such claims are currently allowed by one of the world's most rigorous regulators, Australia's TGA.

Extracts: Studies of glucosamine have shown conflicting results. / Meanwhile, health claims have continued to outstrip the science.

NPNZ's response:

For every negative claim there is a wealth of scientific evidence to prove the therapeutic benefits of nutritional supplements – a point also made on the NIH's website*. As Consumer Magazine correctly points out: *Studies suggest probiotics may be useful in some circumstances.*

Unfortunately creating evidence through randomly-controlled trials is prohibitively expensive for all but very large companies. The pharmaceutical industry has no incentive to fund expensive trials for complementary medicines such as glucosamine, chondroitin and probiotics due to the lack of patent protection. Few complementary medicine manufacturers can afford to fund randomly-controlled trials.

In any case, evidence for all medicines – even those subject to randomly-controlled trials - is changing all the time and in a constant state of flux. Examples include paracetamol, hormone replacement therapy, and over-the-counter cough and cold treatments.

Extract: There's no good evidence of benefits for otherwise healthy adults from taking a daily probiotic supplement...

NPNZ's response:

NPNZ strongly encourages people to seek a health practitioner's advice before taking any dietary supplement so as to ensure that the right kind of product and dosage is being taken for that person's needs. In some cases the advice could be that there is no need to take anything at all.

More.../2

NPNZ response to Consumer Magazine article / 2

Extract: After a lengthy wait, the Natural Health and Supplementary Products Bill was finally introduced into Parliament in 2011. Three years later, it's still waiting to be passed into law.

NPNZ's response:

NPNZ supports the Bill's passage into law because we believe that New Zealand needs a modern regulatory environment that recognises consumers' right to information about natural health products and their functions, and the right to access products that are safe and effective. The new regulations will do this by providing all parties with a higher level of assurance that the natural health and supplementary products available here are safe, approved, effective and contain what is stated on the label. NPNZ has supported the Ministry of Health in its work on the Bill so far, with the view to ensuring that the Bill reflects industry, consumer and the regulator needs.

Increased transparency means that consumers will also be able to find out more about the products they are buying and to therefore become better informed about how best to use them.

Conclusion – NPNZ's closing comments

- Where possible, it is always best to meet one's nutritional needs through a healthy, balanced diet and lifestyle.
- NPNZ encourages consumers to seek a health professional's advice before taking any dietary supplement or other form of health preparation.
- Worldwide there is a growing consumer demand for natural products and there is also a need for affordable health care options that complement or replace pharmaceutical products. NPNZ believes that consumers and the health system alike would benefit from a focus on looking at how to integrate complementary and mainstream medicine for the public's and health system's best advantage (the two needn't be mutually exclusive).

* "Experts disagree on whether glucosamine and chondroitin may help knee and hip osteoarthritis." (Refer to: <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/glucosaminechondroitin>)

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Natural Products New Zealand (NPNZ) is a national industry organisation representing this country's natural products, functional foods, complementary medicines, cosmeceuticals and nutraceuticals industries within New Zealand and internationally.

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