

23 September 1964.

CLINICAL SERVICES LETTER No. 46

TO MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS:

Dear Doctor,

LABELLING WITH THE "PROPER NAME"

You may be interested in the results of an inquiry into the opinions of general practitioners on the proposal that all medicines supplied on prescription be labelled with the "proper name" unless the prescriber directs otherwise.

In March this year Council of the New Zealand branch of the British Medical Association decided in favour of this proposal. The present inquiry was undertaken, with the approval of the Association's Executive, to ascertain whether or not this resolution reflected the views of the average prescriber.

A questionnaire was sent to 170 doctors selected at random. (About 15 per cent of general practitioners and 10 per cent of doctors in active practice.) Only doctors claiming at least £2,000 for General Medical Services last year were included. All districts were represented proportionately.

Only seven doctors, three of whom were overseas, failed to return completed questionnaires.

RESULTS

- (a) Two-thirds (69 per cent) were in favour of automatic labelling with the proper name.
- (b) One-third were not in favour of the proposal, and about 10 per cent appeared to be strongly opposed to it. Considerations mentioned by these last included reference to the psychological value of the placebo, and suggestions that labelling would encourage self-medication, friend-to-friend prescribing, patient demand for named drugs, and an unhealthy interest in side-effects.
- (c) About one-third (31 per cent) would like the Code Reference to be shown on the label instead of the proper name; but only 17 per cent of those who supported labelling with the proper name favoured this alternative.

P.T.O.

Nine out of 10 doctors stated that they at present arrange for some of their prescriptions to be marked with the proper name. About 44 per cent of those who favoured automatic labelling stated that most of their prescriptions were marked in this way. Three out of four who opposed automatic labelling use it with selected prescriptions. Eight doctors who supported automatic labelling admitted that they do not at present ask for the medicines they prescribe to be marked with the proper name.

We would like to thank those who took part in this inquiry. Many supplied lengthy comments; these have been incorporated in a comprehensive report for the Advisory Committee.

Yours faithfully,



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Director,



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