

Letter to the Editor

GLUTEN IN MEDICATIONS

"Is there gluten in this medication?" As the rate of diagnosed people with celiac disease and gluten sensitivity increases, the question is asked more frequently to pharmacists. Hospital pharmacists are at a particular disadvantage, as services are provided 24/7 and answers are often available during business hours only.

Gluten, the protein in wheat, barley, and rye, is toxic to 3 million Americans with celiac disease. It may be used as an excipient in the formulation of medications, though manufacturers are not required to label it on drug packaging or product inserts. Dr. Allison King's November 2010 article, "The Influence of Gluten on Patient Medication Choices," scratches the surface of the challenges faced in identifying whether gluten is in a medication. The article lists manufacturers that purport to offer gluten-free medications. An inquiry to one of the manufacturers, Merck & Co, Inc, found that the company will provide a list of medications that might contain gluten and that are also produced by the company.

Pharmacists are left in an uncertain position. Faced with patients and prescribers who need gluten-free medications, how is one to know which questions will

adequately prompt the manufacturer? Or which medications need a direct inquiry to the manufacturer at all? In March 2011, the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness (NFCA) worked with ProCE to launch a continuing education (CE) program for pharmacists. The 90 minute on-line course is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) through ProCE, and it addresses these concerns.

In addition to learning about celiac disease and its many manifestations, participants will be able to recognize which drugs contain red-flag ingredients and require further investigation and a call to the manufacturer. The course, entitled "GREAT Pharmacists," is available for free and can be accessed at NFCA's Celiac Learning Center (www.CeliacLearning.com) and also directly through ProCE (www.proce.com/ceeliac-disease.cfm). ■

—Loretta Jay, MA
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Response to the Letter to the Editor

Thank you for your letter responding to the special feature, "The Influence of Gluten on Patient Medication Choices," published in the November 2010 issue of *Hospital Pharmacy*. As more people are diagnosed with celiac disease, it becomes an increasingly difficult challenge for all health care and patient providers to help patients maintain a gluten-free diet. This challenge is compounded due to the lack of available resources and available time of health care professionals. Recognizing these burdens, *Hospital Pharmacy* continues to publish articles regarding gluten-free medication options for patients.

The updated list of gluten-free manufacturers provides a great starting place for pharmacists, especially those working after business hours; but, as you stated, it does only scratch the surface. Thus, *Hospital*

Pharmacy published the gluten content of the top 200 medications of 2008 in 2009 and, in this issue, follows up with the gluten content of the top 200 of 2009. These lists provide more extensive answers on specific products. As always, the University of Kansas Drug Information Center is a free resource available to assist both health care professionals and patients with identification of gluten-free medications.

With these articles, the drug information center, and your training programs, we can educate more pharmacists and help advance patient care. Thank you again for your letter. ■

—Allison R. King
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