

# Hard act to swallow

New research among community pharmacists revealed that 60 per cent of people over 65 years of age have experienced difficulty swallowing prescribed medication, and nearly 70 per cent of them have crushed tablets or opened capsules to swallow them.

Pill tampering is dangerous and potentially fatal, as many modern medicines have a special coating designed to release the active ingredient gradually. Crushing a slow-release tablet destroys the coating, which means that the patient gets the full dose too quickly, leading to a potential overdose. However, only 28 per cent of doctors ever ask patients if they are able to swallow their medication.

## Objectives

As manufacturers of liquid medicines Rosemont Pharmaceuticals Ltd had the following objectives:

- To develop an evidence-based consensus guideline on medication management of adults with swallowing difficulties
- To raise public awareness of the dangers of tablet crushing
- To empower patients with swallowing difficulties to ask for a liquid medicine
- To establish the need for liquid medicines.

## Tactics

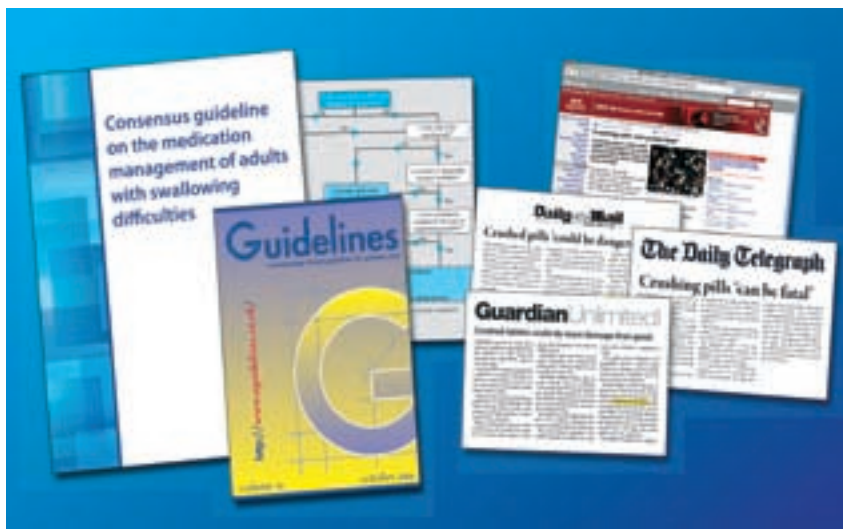
1. Development and publication of an evidence-based consensus guideline 'Medication management of adults with swallowing difficulties'
2. Identifying the right case study
3. Dissemination of the guideline and case study via broadcast and print media.

### Guideline development

A multidisciplinary working party meeting involving key specialities – a general practitioner, geriatrician, lawyer, lecturer in pharmacy practice, and a speech and language therapist – was held to develop the consensus guideline.

### Media campaign

The 'Don't rush to crush' patient-focused campaign was delivered using print and broadcast media and Internet and involved working with independent medical experts to communicate the 'Don't rush to crush' message at the time of the guideline launch. Central to the media campaign was Sarah who told how her grandmother died as a result of tablet crushing. The key to gaining media attention was through the emotional appeal of Sarah's story, balanced by the tablet-crushing facts as presented by



Raising awareness of the potential danger of pill tampering required a well-executed media campaign

medical experts. This combination demonstrated how such a seemingly harmless practice could be lethal.

With a broad target audience (all UK adults including HCPs as consumers), the campaign needed to reach both national and regional audiences. For national radio and television interviews, news editors were invited to interview Sarah alongside Dr David Wright (Senior Lecturer in Pharmacy, University of East Anglia), who had led the guideline development team. In addition, a series of regional radio interviews were given with a leading media doctor; the focus being on the new consensus guideline as the news story.

Patient leaflets about swallowing difficulties and the dangers of tablet crushing were distributed through pharmacies and GP surgeries. Pharmacists were encouraged to include these leaflets in prescription bags of customers over the age of 65. Posters were displayed in 'white coat' environments, encouraging patients to mention swallowing difficulties to a healthcare professional.

## Results

- The new guideline was launched in the October 2006 issue of *Guidelines* and on [www.eGuidelines.co.uk](http://www.eGuidelines.co.uk) (on launch day there were 9,000 downloads) and it was also covered in the November

2006 issue of *Guidelines in Practice*.

- TV coverage included GMTV and BBC Breakfast each having a live interview with their TV doctors fully endorsing the issue. Channel 5 filmed at Sarah's home and ran the story on all three news programmes. The total TV audience alone was over 23 million.
- The story was covered by at least 77 radio stations with a combined weekly reach of over 21 million. A number of news websites, including *The Sun*, the *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Daily Mail*, covered the story – online coverage in the UK alone secured an audience of around 5 million.
- The powerful broadcast coverage led to requests for interviews with Dr Wright, from *Reuters*, the *Daily Mail*, *Independent*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian*, and *The Scotsman*. National press coverage reached an audience of over six million readers.
- More than 250,000 patient leaflets were distributed and posters were displayed in 5,000 healthcare environments.

## Evaluation

The new consensus guideline was well received and achieved a huge amount of coverage – everyone in the UK had four opportunities to see/hear/read the story.



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## Client: Rosemont Pharmaceuticals Ltd

Agency: Connectmedical; Jane Stevenson Communications; Markettiers4DC

Campaign: 'Don't rush to crush'

Timescale: 2006