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PRODUCT INFORMATION OVERLOOKED IN RISK MANAGEMENT PLANNING

The Communication Research Institute (CRI) has found that the biggest failings of product communication collateral is that information is often, ignored, cannot be found, or is not understood, a fact often overlooked when companies are undertaking risk management analysis and planning.

With the shift to provide risk management plans for the introduction of all new pharmaceutical products as part of their approval into the market, both in Europe and Australia, the reliance on outdated communication research when developing product information becomes a risk itself.

Professor David Sless, CEO of the Communication Research Institute, said, “While there are widely accepted principles of risk analysis these often do not account for the quality of communication materials, their role being to correctly inform about a products use and minimise risk to consumers and end users.

“Our research findings continue to show that communication materials are often not of an adequate quality to be understood reliably by the end user. This is particularly concerning when you consider information about pharmaceuticals which are being prescribed by doctors or dispensed by pharmacists,” he said.

There are many examples of how information only shows its failings when things go wrong. “Ambiguous information was highlighted as part of the Bushfire Royal Commission, held in Australia after the devastation of the Victorian Black Saturday Bushfires. It wasn’t until it was too late that people realised the ineffectiveness of the information being given to people about staying and defending their homes or leaving early,” said Sless.

The **Communication Research Institute** has already undertaken major evidence based research into how to minimise risk by ensuring product information is communicated correctly and therefore understood by the people using it. But the issue is not isolated to just the pharmaceutical sector. Poor communication has ramifications across a broad range of industries and Sless believes that including communication as part of risk planning should therefore be a given.

As part of the CRI’s ongoing research within this field, key findings include:

- Information is often not of good quality to be reliably used by the end user or consumer
- Outdated communication methodologies are still being used as the basis for development of product information, often leaving the end user to decide their own way of using the product because of the information’s ambiguity
- Evidence based research allows messages to be tested resulting in high levels of usability and comprehension.

A part of risk management is ensuring a product is used in the manner in which it is intended. To achieve this, the product information should be developed through evidence based research which provides assurances that people reading the information can actually understand it and use that information to properly use the product or service.

Professor Sless added, “Good risk management planning should encompass all efforts to minimise risk but emphasis on the quality of user information is overlooked. While there are always historical learnings which inform risk analysis, the area of communication is often neglected leaving the resulting information as nothing more than ambiguous waffle.”

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Notes to Editors

- The Communication Research Institute is a worldwide **not-for-profit** organisation which is carrying out an international communication benchmarking study, with the first international study focusing on credit card statements. The organisation specializes in the design of public documents across a range of industries. Their work has included redesign of high profile public documents such as the Main Economic Indicators for the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and Insurance Policy and Renewal Documents for the Australian Insurance Group. They have also advised the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC), the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) on the regulation of financial and medicines information for consumers; Government regulators and industry in the EU and Mexico on the regulation of consumer information.
- The Institute researches, practices and disseminates knowledge of practical communication to enhance the quality of communication between people and organisations, lending a quiet dignity to ordinary life.

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