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Free trade agreement: impact on pharmaceuticals unclear

The inclusion of pharmaceuticals in the free trade agreement between the United States and Australia could eventually prove to be a mistake for Australia, according to the latest edition of *Australian Prescriber*.

“Despite the fact that the free trade agreement was signed in May 2004 the details of the pharmaceutical part of the agreement are unclear,” said Dr John Dowden, author of the editorial and Editor of *Australian Prescriber*.

“Currently the agreement states that there is to be increased regulatory co-operation between the US and Australia with a view to making innovative medical products more quickly available.

“It remains unclear what will happen should Australia decide not to approve or list a new drug – could this be considered as a breach of the agreement?

“The agreement also allows pharmaceutical companies to disseminate information to consumers via the internet – yet Australian laws prevent pharmaceutical companies from advertising prescription medicines directly to consumers.

“Australia has committed to strict standards regarding pharmaceutical intellectual property and patents. We need to know if this protection for industry will protect Australian consumers from higher prices,” Dr Dowden continued.

Dr John Dowden is an advocate for quality use of medicines in Australia, a medical practitioner and has been the Editor of *Australian Prescriber* for the past 14 years.

For the complete article visit the *Australian Prescriber* web site www.australianprescriber.com

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