Acetaminophen benefits from concerns surrounding safety

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Acetaminophen benefits from concerns surrounding safety of analgesics, by Euromonitor International

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Americans' new found confidence in acetaminophen came after questions were raised over the safety of some analgesics. Studies in 2004 linked the use of Vioxx, an anti-inflammatory prescription drug, with an increased risk of heart disease, which led to the product being recalled. Then in April 2005, the US Food and Drug Administration asked Pfizer to recall Bextra, a similar prescription drug, and also warned that OTC non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as, Aleve, would need to carry stronger warnings in the future about the risks of heart attack, stroke, ulcers, internal bleeding and skin reactions.

Being in a separate drug class from anti-inflammatories, such as, ibuprofen and naproxen, meant that acetaminophen escaped public concern over safety and it managed to achieve growth of 4.3% between 2004-2005. It can be distinguished from these drugs, as it is less likely to interact with other medications or irritate the stomach. It is also considered safe for patients with conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. Meanwhile, most analgesics faced a difficult environment and the overall category struggled to achieve growth of 0.4%. In the same year, ibuprofen only reached 0.7% growth and ketoprofen and naproxen declined by 10% and 14.6%, respectively, according to Euromonitor International' s research.Tylenol capitalises on safety scare

Tylenol, owned by McNeil Consumer & Specialty Pharmaceuticals, is the most popular brand of acetaminophen, commanding a 14.2% share of the analgesics market, according to Euromonitor International. McNeil used the product withdrawals and the public's safety concerns as an opportunity to boost the performance of its Tylenol brand. The company increased its adspend in medical journals, reminding medical professionals about the safety of its products and introduced an ad campaign promoting its Tylenol Arthritis brand as â€œthe preferred first-line of drug therapy for the pain of osteoarthritisâ€•, while being gentle on the stomach. This marketing activity saw sales of the product increase by almost 18% in 2005.

Tylenol also introduced a re-engineered gelcap technology found in its new Tylenol Extra Strength Rapid Release Gels. McNeil worked hard with drug retailers to merchandise the product effectively and supported the launch with an extensive marketing campaign. As a result, McNeil managed to increase its value share of the US market by almost one percentage point in 2005.Strong outlook for acetaminophen

Euromonitor International predicts that acetaminophen will see average growth of nearly 2% a year over the next five years, which is strong in comparison to the rest of the analgesics sector. This is due to continued consumer concerns regarding OTC NSAIDs and the drug's favourable position as a safe pain reliever. The overall systemic, adult analgesics sector is expected to achieve growth of only 0.8% per year between 2005-2010. Sales of ibuprofen will remain flat at 0.2% per year and ketopreofen and naproxen will continue to experience declines of 8.9% and 2.4% per year, respectively.

Despite poor performance for most analgesics, there is an optimistic outlook for Aspirin, which is forecast to grow by 1.4% per year over 2005-2010. This is due to the widespread use of aspirin for heart attack prevention and consumer trust in the product, as it, too, does not belong to the OTC class of NSAID's.

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