

MORE PHARMACEUTICAL NEWS

GEMS defends vitamin contract

In May the Government Employees' Medical Scheme (GEMS), SA's biggest medical scheme for public servants, defended its decision to award Afrocentric subsidiary Activo Health a multimillion-rand contract to provide its members with multivitamins, saying it was responding to their demands for immune boosters to fend off Covid-19, reported ***Business Day*** (11 May 2022).

This follows the Council for Medical Schemes' (CMS), announcement that it has started an inquiry into GEMS outsourcing the selection of a vitamin provider to its managed care provider, Medscheme, which is also a subsidiary of JSE-listed Afrocentric. GEMS said it wasn't aware that Activo Health was also a subsidiary of Afrocentric when the contract had been awarded

On 13 May *Business Day* reported that the Independent Community Pharmacy Association (ICPA) warned GEMS that its controversial plan to deliver multivitamins to all its adult beneficiaries flew in the face of good clinical practice, and that its chosen product was overpriced.

- ICPA CEO Jackie Maimin said there was insufficient high-quality evidence demonstrating that multivitamins and minerals were beneficial for the public, and global health authorities did not recommend routine prescribing of these products.

SA and Covid IP waiver

In April *Business Day* reported that more than 300 activists, academics and organisations from around the world have urged SA and India to reject the leaked compromise deal that emerged earlier this year at World Trade Organization (WTO) talks on a waiver for intellectual property rights for Covid-19 technologies.

In June *Bloomberg News* reported that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) approved a package of agreements that included the vaccine patent waiver, after negotiations in Geneva, Switzerland. Previously, the Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said it was necessary to end the "morally unacceptable" inequity of access to Covid-19 vaccines.

"The deal delivers a significant blow to vaccine manufacturers such as Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca, which fought hard to prevent nations from undermining the intellectual-property framework that enabled them to produce multiple viable Covid-19 vaccines in record time," reported ***Bloomberg***.

"The debate overcame a protracted fight between the US and China over the Biden administration's demand that China be clearly excluded from the deal - for fear that it would enable China to steal US technologies."

- "Despite over 60 countries co-sponsoring the India-South Africa waiver proposal and around 100 countries supporting it, a handful of powerful, rich countries were allowed to scupper it with the complicity of the WTO secretariat," according to an opinion piece in ***News24*** (20 May 2022)

Fitness, jabs help prevent long Covid

According to research by Discovery Health, fit people who have been vaccinated have a lower risk of long Covid-19.

“The research combined a survey of beneficiaries of the 19 medical schemes administered by JSE-listed Discovery’s subsidiary Discovery Health with claims data, vaccination status and detailed information about their physical activity before they were diagnosed with Covid-19,” reported *Business Day* (10 June 2022).

People who had high levels of physical activity before they were diagnosed with Covid-19, exercising for more than 150 minutes a week, were 47% less likely to report four or more lingering symptoms after their initial infection. Those who were moderately physically active, and exercised from 60 to 150 minutes a week, were 36% less likely to report long Covid-19. Vaccination was associated with a 17% lower risk of long Covid-19.”