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Board of Pharmacy Bows to Industry Interests

Advocates are outraged at the Board of Pharmacy's decisions to weaken regulations originally designed to ensure that patients can read their prescription drug labels

(Sacramento, CA) - On February 17th, the Board of Pharmacy will review regulations to implement SB472 (Corbett). Passed in 2008, this law requires the Board to create a standardized, patient-centered prescription drug label by 2011. With a goal of providing medical information in a uniform, legible, and linguistically appropriate manner, this is critical to the health of all Californians.

However, after a last-minute appointment of a CVS pharmacist by the Schwarzenegger Administration to cast tie-breaking votes, the Board of Pharmacy voted for regulations that significantly weaken the regulations.

The two main issues of concern are the legibility and linguistic appropriateness of the labels. As the January 20th meeting the Board took a major step backwards -- dropping the font size requirement from 12 to 10 point and eliminating the required use of translated labels. These changes fail to meet the needs of California's seniors and diverse populations that may not read English.

This is not just a consumer convenience, but a question of safety. In terms of patient harm, the Institute of Medicine projects that at least 1.5 million Americans are sickened, injured, or killed each year by medication errors. **For California that translates into a \$17.7 billion dollar problem affecting over 150,000 patients.**

"Studies have shown that many people, including those with college degrees, misunderstand the instructions on prescription drug labels," says Alice Hm Chen, MD, MPH, Medical Director, General Medicine Clinic, San Francisco Hospital. "For an elderly patient with poor vision or someone with limited English skills, the verdict is clear: our current cluttered and confusing prescription labeling system is failing Californians."

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