



the Ethics Centre of South Australia



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Central Seminar Series 2008

Tuesday 11 November 2008

3.30pm – 4.30pm

Scots Centre (*next to Scots Church*)

Cnr North Terrace and Pulteney Street, Adelaide

The Rise and Fall of Vioxx: Unethical behaviour or system failure

Presented by

Professor Michael James

**Chief Medical Scientist, Rheumatology Unit,
Royal Adelaide Hospital**

The anti-inflammatory drug, Vioxx, was launched in 1999 and had 4 to 5 years of sales in the 'blockbuster' category. It was withdrawn from the market in October 2004 by the pharmaceutical company, Merck, due to 'new information' that it greatly increased the risk of cardiovascular problems such as heart attacks.

However, there was strong clinical evidence from the very beginning of its marketed life that Vioxx caused cardiovascular problems. This evidence was in the public domain but it had no effect on Vioxx sales. During this 4 to 5 year period, the selective blindness and deafness to the cardiovascular problems with Vioxx provides a case study of drug company tactics.

However, it is arguable that these tactics were unethical unless we argue that drug companies should not be run as businesses. It is easier to argue that commerce should not be used to develop drugs.

Michael James BAgSc(Hons), PhD, Grad Cert Pub Health

- *Chief Medical Scientist, Rheumatology Unit, Royal Adelaide Hospital*
- *Professor, Discipline of Medicine, The University of Adelaide*
- *Chairman, Human Research Ethics Committee, Royal Adelaide Hospital*
- *Chairman, Human Research Ethics Committee, Cancer Council SA*

Michael has research funding from the NHMRC, National Heart Foundation, ARC, and private industry with projects that encompass his two main research activities; namely,

- *Effects of dietary omega-3 fats such as those found in fish oil and certain vegetable oils, on cardiovascular disease and rheumatoid arthritis.*
- *Metabolism of dietary omega-3 fats.*
- *Synthesis of inflammatory mediators, especially those produced by the enzyme, COX-2, which is the target for the anti-inflammatory drugs Celebrex and Vioxx.*

Please RSVP to Vicki Hattam, Centre Coordinator
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Public Seminar
All Welcome