

# Ear candling action overdue

Lance Gravatt

In 2010, the FDA and Health Canada acted against manufacturers of ear candles.<sup>1</sup> These actions have included import alerts, seizures, injunctions and warning letters. The authorities warn consumers of the potential risks:

- burns to the face, ear canal, eardrum and middle ear
- injury to the ear from dripping wax
- ears plugged by candle wax
- bleeding
- puncture of the eardrum
- delay in seeking needed medical care for underlying conditions such as sinus and ear infections, hearing loss, cancer and temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders. (TMJ disorders often cause headache and painful sensations in the area of the ear, jaw and face).

In 2017, The American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery Foundation (AAO-HNSF) has published a supplement to this issue of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery, featuring the updated Clinical Practice Guideline: Earwax

(Cerumen Impaction).<sup>2</sup> These guidelines state that ear candling is “contraindicated” with Grade C evidence based on systematic reviews and randomised trials.

However, in New Zealand we do not have to look far to find ear candles readily available in most retail pharmacies, health shops and online. For example, Happy Ears claim “ear candles have been used for centuries and is considered a painless, inexpensive and non-invasive way to potentially remove ear wax that is easy to use in the privacy of your home.” “It is considered a painless, harmless and totally relaxing experience.” A pair of Happy Ears - Ear Candles costing \$18.00 online.<sup>3</sup> It is of concern that these products remain available to consumers in New Zealand and carry no warnings. For a therapeutic intervention that carries a greater risk of harm than chance of proven benefit, the regulatory response would be to prohibit promotion and supply. At the very least ear candles should carry a prominent consumer warning as stated by AAO-HNSF:

“Ear candling or ear coning is NOT a safe option for earwax removal.”<sup>4</sup>

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#### Competing interests:

Nil.

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