

Drugs, Not Foods, Are Toxic

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Steps are necessary to ensure that the existence of dietary supplements on the market does not act as a disincentive for drug development. (FDA Task Force Report, June 15, 1993)

The Food and Drug Administration is again spending millions of tax dollars in its yearly attempt to increase drug sales by restricting the distribution of dietary supplements. These actions are contrary to the public interest.

FDA Commissioner David Kessler recently rationalized his efforts by alleging, "For every one of these products that has some value, there are thousands that are worthless." This is unsupportable. In fact, his charges are much more appropriate when applied to pharmaceutical drugs rather than to foods.

On 15 percent of the drugs on the market have been subjected to controlled testing, according to the United States Department of Technological Assessment. In fact, 85 percent of the drugs Americans take are unproven or have actually been proven ineffective!

Are these thousands of questionable drugs even safe? The prestigious Yale-New Haven hospital has published their conclusions that pharmaceuticals, properly prescribed and properly taken, account for 100,000 deaths each year in this country alone. Tens of millions more Americans are made sick or fail to seek appropriate health care every year because of chronic, ongoing drug use "taken as directed." One million are hospitalized annually solely as a result of reactions to prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines. The cost in dollars and human suffering staggers the imagination. But the FDA wants to limit peoples' access to food supplements.

These drug statistics are not acceptable. They represent an indictment of the FDA and the pharmaceutical industry. If an automobile driver had a safety record like this, responsible authorities would make certain that his license was revoked before sundown and would probably jail the culprit as well. But the FDA ignores the drug disaster and wants to restrict the distribution of food supplements.

So the cycle continues. Drugs are approved by the FDA today, distributed, then found unsafe tomorrow and withdrawn, only to be replaced with new wonder drugs that are subsequently taken off the market as health hazards. If drugs were safe and effective, would we need the \$1.5 billion of mindless, hard-sell advertising every month to goad us into taking them and giving them to our children?

In contrast, with few exceptions and very little advertising, food supplements have enjoyed great safety and increasing demand for decades.

How safe are these food substances? Vitamin A is often pointed to as one of the more toxic dietary supplements. Yet according to the Merck manual, vitamin A has had no fatalities associated with its use of abuse. This includes accidental ingestion of millions of IUs at one sitting and weeks of megadosages given to infants.

The simple, incontrovertible fact is this: All drugs are dangerous; foods and supplements are safe. Anyone with a paper and pencil can quickly figure out for themselves that pharmaceuticals will sicken and kill more Americans in the next seven days than "health foods" have in the past 10 years. Drugs need to be controlled much more strictly and distributed more sparingly than they are now. Supplements should be regulated for sanitation like any other food.

Curtailing sales of dietary supplements will not protect the public. It will harm millions of intelligent, responsible people. However, pharmaceutical manufacturers and their distributors will enjoy windfall profits if these FDA propositions are allowed to become law. Whose interests are really being served by this legislation?

Every year the FDA and pharmaceutical industry misappropriate tax dollars to mount another offensive against America's health. Unchecked, eventually these unprincipled forces will prevail. The flood of drugs will continue to rise, destroying more of our parents and children. Congress must permanently stop this ongoing campaign which is subverting the enlightened efforts of Americans who want to improve their lives by reducing their dependence on medical drugs.

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