

YOUR RIGHT TO BUY HERBS & VITAMIN SUPPLEMENTS IS UNDER ATTACK by Ellen Kamhi, PhD



There is a very specific, active assault brewing that will impact the availability of natural products. One reason I believe this is occurring is that the natural foods and remedy movement has grown substantially, and now is an actual threat to pharmaceutical company profits. There are many factors fueling this movement. Basically, the 'jig is up' meaning people are waking up to the fact that self-care with a focus on healthy eating, exercise and a positive mental attitude, along with appropriate nutritional supplementation is a way better bet than eating the SAD (Standard American diet), getting degenerative diseases, and then hoping a regimen of toxic drugs will

bring them back to health. As more people have LESS health care coverage, or lose it all together, they are turning en masse to using natural alternatives, such as herbs and vitamins instead of drugs, since the drugs are no longer "free" once you do not have health insurance coverage. Enter the FDA. Currently, the FDA is proposing that NDI (New Dietary Ingredient) registration processes be instituted for any ingredient that was not already in use when the DSHEA (Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act) was instituted in 1994. To see the exact FDA proposal visit <http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/GuidanceDocuments/DietarySupplements/ucm257563.htm>

This regulation may have a direct effect on the availability of natural products, because in order to comply with many of the regulations, supplement manufacturers would have to spend more in registration fees, than they could hope to earn through the sale of the product. Of course, pharmaceutical companies have the deep pockets necessary to conform to these registration procedures, and would be in a favorable position to take over the natural products industry.

If you are inclined to believe that this kind of extra regulation may be a good thing since it may enhance safety, let me remind you that the more that dietary supplements are seriously investigated, the safer they appear to be. Of course, there are negative effects, such as the rare case of deaths associated with taking ephedra, especially when improperly combined with other recreational stimulants. However, when we look at all the statistics side-by-side, herbal and vitamin supplements are much safer to use than pharmaceutical drugs. The American Association of Poison Control Centers released statistics in 2009 after an exhaustive 174-page study found that not a single death was caused by a dietary supplement in 2008. The data was published in the journal Clinical Toxicology. On the other hand, highly regulated pharmaceutical medications pose a significant risk to patients, with 1.9 million adverse drug events occurring each year, and up to 180,000 of these are life-threatening or fatal (JAMA, Mar 5, 2003). Note the severity and astronomical numbers associated with adverse drug events, vs. the small

incidence of adverse events due to supplements. Clearly, the 43 million dollars spent on FDA drug regulation does not make drugs safe.

To add fuel to this fire, a poorly written and deeply flawed paper entitled "Dietary Supplements-Regulatory Issues and Implications for Public Health" was conveniently published in the July 13 addition of JAMA. It makes many statements such as "Studies conducted by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine have shown that ginkgo biloba, in particular, does not reduce the risk of cancer nor does it prove effective in reducing high blood pressure among older adults." I found this statement troubling because no one trained in holistic medicine would recommend this herb for this purpose in the first place! The Natural Products Association offers an in depth response to this article at <http://www.npainfo.org/index.php?src=news&srctype=detail&category=pressreleases2011&refno=333>

I am sure the main concern by whoever funded the writing of this article is summed up by "the fact that more than 150 million US residents use dietary supplements should be a point of concern as many users will almost certainly forgo conventional medical treatment in favor of using products that may offer no medicinal value." ...AND they might add, these millions of US residents will use their money to purchase supplements instead of pharmaceuticals!

In addition, a new bill has been introduced by Senator Dick Durbin (D-ILL.), S. 1310, called the "Dietary Supplement Labeling Act of 2011." This bill would give the FDA additional enforcement powers, even though it has not been effective at using the powers it already has under DSHEA. Senator Durbin suggested that he initiated this bill due to the sale of "Lazy Cakes." This is a brownie food that contains melatonin, which is a hormone that is sold as a supplement. As a natural health care practitioner since 1964, I would call this a potentially dangerous product that should be removed from the market by the FDA and they already have the power to do this. However, instead of removing this product, the Durbin Bill would include burdensome registration requirements for all responsible supplement manufacturers. This legislation would be so economically burdensome to natural supplement companies, many of which are run by small businesses, that it could lead to decreased availability of all kinds of useful natural supplements by simply forcing many companies out of business.

By the way, the United States is not the only country experiencing a massive crack-down on the availability of supplements. In the UK, the Traditional Herbal Medicines Directive has recently come into play and is already severely limiting the availability and sale of many natural herbal products in that country. If you are interested in maintaining your right to choose natural supplements as part of your personal health self-care, now is the time to take action! Call your representatives and oppose the passage of these expensive, unnecessary and crippling legislative measures.

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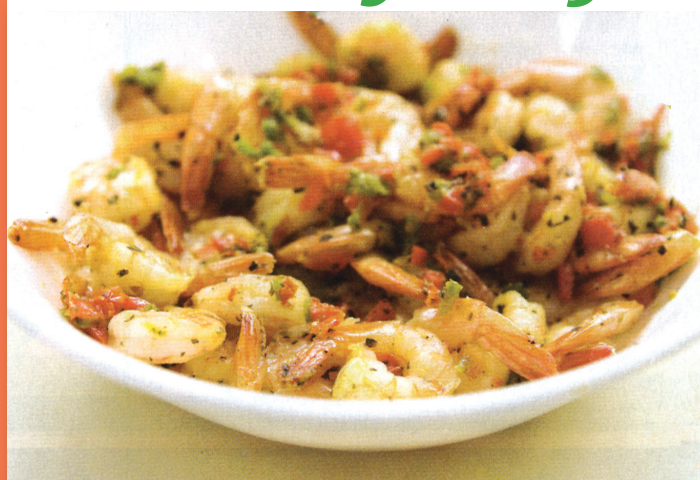
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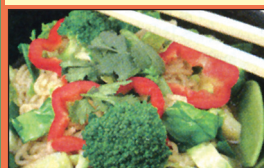
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