

Big Pharma Plays God, Stealing and Altering Plant Compounds making Synthetic Drugs

It has been claimed by the Nutritional Health Alliance (NHA) that the pharmaceutical companies are formulating their pharma drugs using natural plant-derived substances. This is not totally groundbreaking news, of course, since the whole pharmaceutical industry was based on natural products such as aspirin, derived from willow bark, and antibiotics derived from the penicillin mold.

While there is nothing wrong with them doing this, there are signs of their increasing lobbying to limit the supply of supplements so that Big Pharma can monopolize the production and supply of all supplements and remedies, natural or synthetic. What is disturbing is that bills such as the Adverse Event Reporting Bill, passed by Congress in February 2007 as the Dietary Supplement and Nonprescription Drug Consumer Protection Act, could conceivably place greater powers into the hands of the large pharmaceutical companies to restrict the sales of natural products that are not part of their 'approved' prescription range.

This Act requires users and distributors of over the counter and non-prescriptive natural remedies to report any adverse effects that they believe have been caused by the remedy they are using. What this does is to require untrained people to make medical decisions as to what is causing their adverse reaction.

A patient taking several prescription drugs and a vitamin supplement might naturally assume that it is the vitamin that is causing their reaction, since they will believe the drugs to be safe. Hence they will report the vitamin supplement as being the cause. Since the act does not oblige them to report reactions from prescription drugs, then this opens the door for Big Pharma to hijack plant compounds, and then alter them to make synthetic drugs.

The position of the FDA in all of this is dubious since that body has already made many decisions that favor the large pharma companies rather than the consumer, or producers of herbal remedies.

However, there is also the opposite view that the supplement industry is unregulated, and some degree of control is long overdue. While it is difficult to argue against this, it is the form of control that is in question and also the reasons behind it.

The pharmaceutical companies have long gained through America's ill health, and it is to their advantage for Americans to become ill or suffer from the chronic diseases that come with a sedentary lifestyle and a diet of fast foods. The industry's short-sighted approach has been to wait until people become ill and then treated them with expensive drug, rather than prevention that would ultimately lose them customers for their products.

A happy and healthy community, regularly taking supplements that keep them fit and well, is not to the advantage of pharmaceutical companies that prefer a depressed, unfit and sick American population to which they can sell their products. Hence the smear campaigns in the press regarding 'uncontrolled' natural remedies, untold bills in Congress, and what could end up as the ultimate revocation of our freedom to consume the natural products of our choice.

If we are taking two or three prescription drugs for a heart condition or to reduce the cholesterol levels in our body, and also an Omega-3 fatty acids capsule, we are urged to report the capsule if we have any side effects from the cocktail. Presumably on the basis that the drugs have been approved by the FDA, and so cannot possibly cause any side effects in us. A fish oil capsule is hardly likely to cause a heart attack, but many prescription drugs can if badly prescribed. However, it is the capsule that is likely to be fingered, banned and then included in a pharmaceutical product that is cleared by the FDA.

Those that take over the counter supplements, vitamins and herbal remedies are a threat and it is difficult not to become cynical about the intentions of such Acts of Congress and the people behind them. True, the supplement and herbal industry probably does require some form of regulation, but to phrase this in such a way as to require medically untrained people to report what they perceive as being the adverse effects of supplements rings of an intention to regulate by restriction or even banning.

When that occurs, Big Pharma will take these products and fashion them into expensive prescriptive drugs that are then approved for use by the FDA. What we were at one time able to purchase from our local health store we would now have to purchase at several times the price through prescription.

The health benefits of natural nutritional supplements are well documented, and the industry are now using methods to ensure standardization of the active ingredients where possible. However, this is not always possible with foodstuffs that do not always grow in standardized ways.

The Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA) was passed by Congress in 1994 to protect and preserve our rights to healthy

supplementation of our diets with natural products of our choice. The FDA has systematically failed to enforce this and prosecute synthetic manufacturers who have not kept to the law. The FDA does not need new powers, but the funding to implement those already in existence.

Lobbying in Congress by interested parties should not be allowed to undermine the rights of all Americans of the freedom to consume the products that will provide them with a healthier lifestyle. The DHSEA is all that is needed to preserve this and to protect consumers from Big Pharma and their need to create conditions conducive to an increasing need for their products.

Yes, the health supplements industry likely needs some form of regulation to ensure standardization of products as far as is possible, but the way to do this is not to place medical decisions into the hands of the untrained. Do not forget that these are natural products, available freely from nature in fruit, vegetable and animal products, and are not synthesized in a laboratory as many of today's drugs are.

However, give them a free rein, and Big Pharma will hijack these natural products, change them and then sell them to us at highly inflated prices to do the job that already do for us: keep us healthy.

About the Author

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