

HealthPolitics

Vitamin potencies on the block—an international fight

The dietary supplements you now take for granted may not be available to you in the next few years! Certainly not in the potencies you're using.

If you take mega doses of vitamin C to help fight heart disease, for instance, you may soon find that a 60-milligram tablet is the maximum dosage available—without a doctor's prescription—because the prophecy is that vitamins will be classed as drugs! That's already the case in Germany and in Norway. Now it's happening in Britain.

A European Union (EU) Food Supplements Directive is setting maximum levels for vitamins and minerals—for “safety” reasons!

In March of last year a 626-member legislative body representing 15 European Union countries passed a Directive on Dietary Supplements that effectively changes the category of vitamins from food to medical drugs. Vitamins will be manufactured by mainstream pharmaceutical companies and require a doctor's prescription to buy them. A “transition period” of three years for vitamin supplements already on the market is granted, but by 2005 every EU country will be required to enforce the new rules (*Sunday Telegraph*, July 21, 2002)!

The EU Directive smoothly states, “In order to ensure a high level of protection for consumers and to facilitate their choices, the products that will be put on the market must be safe and bear adequate and appropriate labelling.”

Last year, more than 600 million people read that statement and sent a resounding “No!” around the world in the largest global online petition ever. Another 604 million to date have added their names. (Read the petition on vitamins-for-all.org and sign on. It's a Web site created by Dr. Matthias

Rath, a leading researcher in the field of natural remedies for cancer and heart disease and a very vocal international advocate for unhindered access to vitamin therapy.)

The European Union is not unbiased in its decision. Its members are decidedly pro-drug. A number of EU commissioners have direct links to international pharmaceutical companies. EU Commissioner Frits Bolkenstein of the Netherlands, for instance, is a member of the supervisory board of Merck, Sharp and Dohme, the second-largest pharmaceutical company in the world!

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The purpose of the attack on vitamins is not consumer safety. It's drug protectionism. Alternative medicine, of which vitamin therapy is a major part, is a threat to the future of pharmaceutical profits. (Most people are convinced of the efficacy of vitamin supplementation for health though many are afraid to mention it to their doctors!) Governments don't dare rule vitamins illegal, so the international response tactic is to reduce the recommended daily allowance (RDA), a minimum dose arbitrarily chosen to prevent nutritional deficiency. The “recommended” dose of vitamin C would do nothing for your cold. The recommended allowance of vitamin E would not be therapeutic for heart disease. A more realistic approach is the Optimal Nutrient Allowance, which is a “safe upper level.” Consumers can then make their own decision.



Supplements in Britain are currently sold under food law, as most are here, which means they have to be as safe as the food on your plate. Conventional pharmaceutical drugs are sold on a “costs versus benefits” basis. The rationale is that the beneficial effects of the drug should be balanced against its risks. Adverse side-effects are accepted as part of the pharmaceutical package!

No such leniency for vitamins, despite the fact there has never been a death due to vitamins and minerals in the UK (*The Guardian*, Sept. 14, 2002).

Then there's the EU Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive, which says that herbal remedies can only be licensed if they are shown to be safe and produced to high standards. But herbal remedies will be licensed as drugs and must go through the same costly regulatory procedures, costing about 10 million pounds each! In Canada it's an equivalent in dollars! And since any product sold in a health food store, even herbal tea, can be classified as medicine, guess which manufacturer goes out of business?

Canada next?

Not if we can help it!

RHODY LAKE

Rhody Lake is a freelance researcher and journalist, and former editor of *alive*.

