

The Big Washout

For years the mainstay has been nutrients in health food stores, a few pharmacies, and preventive practitioners providing patients with “doctor oriented products.” Over the past two years the calls to me have increased from once a month to once a week, and now finally to once a day. The categories are: 1. Large HMO group has decided to start making nutritional supplements available to members. 2. Large company, which supplies groups of doctors’ offices, has decided to start selling nutritional supplements to clinics and directly to patients. 3. Group of venture capitalists has raised X million dollars and decided to start complementary clinics, incorporating the sale of nutritional supplements to the patients. 4. Group of venture capitalists has raised X million dollars and wants to become “the one stop shop on the Internet” for nutritional supplements. 5. Doc has been hired as consultant for one of the proceeding and needs advice. 6. Doc, along with venture capitalists, has decided to open interactive web site to interact with and provide supplements to patients. 7. Giant pharmacy supplier wants to provide specialized products to pharmacies along with educational program. 8. Multi Level Marketing (MLM) or Networking company. Enough said.

The consumer backlash, which brought about DSHEA, is a direct result of the arrogance of the medical establishment that receives its post-graduate training from pharmaceutical detail people. The beauty of the revolution is that much of the funding is coming from those who have benefited from complementary and alternative medicine. Wall Street is speaking, and yes the bottom line is involved somewhat. It is amusing to talk to people who are enthused that joint pain has been relieved in weeks from glucosamine sulfate, after spending years without success in the conventional medical model — a decade of pharmaceutical-treated arrhythmia disappearing in three days of coenzyme Q-10 treatment. Such revelations certainly have made some investors think twice about the direction of medicine.

The downside will be confusion. With deep pockets, the investors will start an advertising free-for-all with new companies all declaring to be the best, and, in the time-honored tradition of advertising, selling sizzle, not substance or quality. Compounding this will be two types of consumer: those who have spent years taking dietary supplements and improving their knowledge of “nutraceuticals,” and those who have blindly listened to mainstream advertising that says all you need in a daily supplement can be found in one small tablet or caplet sold at a bargain price in the pharmacy section of your grocery store. The first group will be the target of internet sales and the esoteric product companies. The second group will be the target of the OTC/pharmaceutical companies who will bundle ginkgo (theirs being the *only* quality product on the market) with a minute amount of B-6, compound it with an inordinate amount of excipients, so the product ends up in the toilet, and sell it to their existing customer base. The only sure bet after death and taxes is that the first group won’t be caught dead buying those products aimed at the second group. They know better. Unfortunately, mainstream medicine will probably be stuck in lockstep with the second group.

A big monkey wrench may well be legislation such as that attempting to be enacted in New Jersey, limiting the sales of products from doctor’s offices. The kiss of death may well be those doctors engaged in enticing their patients into MLM sales, a practice which will be viewed very negatively by any legislature. The passage of any such legislation would make those MLM doctors bear the brunt of responsibility. At the true “bottom” of the food chain, the nature of the MLM, like a hemorrhoid, makes it difficult to eliminate.

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