

Intentional Drug Contamination of Herbal Supplements

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September 2008

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has found prescription drugs in herbal supplements sold over-the-counter. The FDA found Viagra (sildenafil) and other erectile dysfunction drugs in Zimaxx, Libidus, Neophase, Nasutra, Vigor-25, Actra-Rx, and 4EVERON, all products that promise enhanced sexual function. **They claim an herbal remedy for impotence, then sneak in a prescription drug to accomplish the goal.**

Other medications found in ‘natural’ dietary supplements include lovastatin (Mevacor, to lower cholesterol), estrogen (for hot flashes and menopausal symptoms), alprazolam (Xanax, for anxiety), indomethacin (Indocin, for arthritis and pain) and warfarin (Coumadin, to prevent blood clotting). Often the secret ingredient relates directly to the purpose of the supplement.

It’s obvious why manufacturers would not disclose such ingredients: Any time a drug appears in any form meant to be ingested, the efficacy and safety must be tested and FDA approved, regardless of what else is in the pill. Such approval requires rigorous pre-market testing (some other time we can discuss whether drug testing is truly rigorous or unduly influenced by the drug companies).

Do manufacturers have so little faith in their natural ingredients that they have to add proven drugs to achieve an effect? Many herbs do exert pharmacologic benefits – Why not trust them?

The 1994 Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA) amended the Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act to exempt dietary supplements, including herbs, botanicals and nutritional supplements from usual pre-marketing review. As a result of these provisions, **ingredients used in dietary supplements are not subject to pre-market safety evaluations required of other new food and drug ingredients or for new uses of old ingredients.**

Because dietary and herbal supplements do not comply with these requirements, there is no guarantee of their safety, effectiveness, or purity. **You have no way of knowing whether the label’s listed ingredients match, overstate or forget to reveal what is really in the bottle.**

Like the fox guarding the hen-house, the law asks that herbal and dietary supplement manufacturers provide their own oversight. The FDA only gets involved if post-marketing reports suggest there is a problem.

We trust that purveyors of “natural” products will be honest about their products’ contents. Unfortunately the pursuit of market share and the legal tender incites dishonesty in people we would hope to have high ideals.