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Consumer Health Digest #09-14

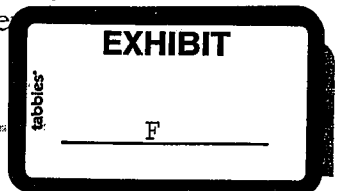
Your Weekly Update of News and Reviews
April 2, 2009

Consumer Health Digest is a free weekly e-mail newsletter edited by Stephen Barrett, M.D., and cosponsored by NCAHF and Quackwatch. It summarizes scientific reports; legislative developments; enforcement actions; news reports; Web site evaluations; recommended and nonrecommended books; and other information relevant to consumer protection and consumer decision-making.

Prince Charles criticized for marketing "dodgy" products. Edzard Ernst, MD, Ph.D., Professor of Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the University of Exeter, has harshly criticized claims made for herbal products sold by Duchy Originals, a firm owned by Prince Charles. In January, the UK Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) upheld a complaint over the online advertising of two of the company's products, Duchy Herbals Echina-Relief Tincture and Duchy Herbals Hyper-Lift Tincture. The offending claims were removed from the company's Web site. In March, Ernst blasted the company's promotion of Detox Artichoke and Dandelion Tincture, as "quackery" and nicknamed the brand "Dodgy Originals." In a follow-up report posted to Quackwatch, Ernst debunked the quack concept of "detoxification" and said:

If detox products worked, that would be easy to demonstrate. Simply take a few blood samples from volunteers and test whether this or that toxin is eliminated from the body faster than normal. But where are the studies that demonstrate efficacy? They do not exist, and the reason is simple: such products have no real detoxification effects.

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is reported to be investigating claims made for Duchy's detox product. The company's Web site states that Prince Charles established Duchy in 1990 to "promote organic food and farming and to help protect and sustain the countryside and wildlife." In 2006, Sense about Science issued a press statement in which prominent scientists urged people not to waste their money on "detox" products.



Slate article blasts the urine toxic metals test. Slate magazine has published new information about the urine toxic metals test done by Doctors Data Laboratory. In February, Quackwatch posted a close look at how the "Urine Toxic Metals" test is used to trick people into thinking that they have lead or mercury poisoning and need "detoxification" with chelation therapy.

[Barrett S. [How the "Urine Toxic Metals" test is used to defraud patients](#). Quackwatch, Feb 18, 2009] The heart of the process is "provoked" testing in which a chelating agent is given before the specimen is obtained. This artificially raises the levels of heavy metals in the urine. The test report, a copy of which is given to the patient, states that its "reference values" are for non-provoked specimens. However, if a test level exceeds the reference values, it is reported as "elevated" even though it should be considered insignificant. In March 2009, Arthur Allen, a prominent science writer, tried to interview an official at Doctor's Data but received no response to his request. However, he did manage to talk with someone at the company who said that the lab was doing about 100,000 of the tests per year. When he asked about the reference range problem, he was told there was no way to establish a reference range for provoked specimens, because provocation might be done with various chelating agents, at varying doses. "The tests are ordered by physicians, so they can interpret the results," the employee said. "They do what they want with this information." [Allen A. [Treating autism as if vaccines caused it: The theory may be dead, but the treatments live on](#). Slate, April 1, 2009]

Misguided legislator pushing for dietary supplement coverage. Maine State Representative Andrea Boland is crusading for a bill intended to force insurance companies to pay for all "nutritional measures and products, including dietary supplements, whose primary purposes are to enhance health, improve nutritional intake, strengthen the immune system, cleanse the body of toxins, address specific health needs and aid in resisting disease." The bill would require coverage and reimbursement for all such methods "shown to be beneficial to an enrollee's health when used as directed by the manufacturer or manufacturer's representative and recommended by the enrollee's physician." A local newspaper editorial indicates that Boland was motivated by a personal experience and makes from \$500 to \$1,000 per month as a distributor for Reliv International (a multilevel marketing company). The report expressed concern about this conflict of interest and noted that Maine's highest public health official opposed the bill. [[Lawmaker crosses ethical boundary](#). Morning Sentinel, March 25, 2009] The bill would apply to all products (including herbs) that fit the federal definition of "dietary supplement."

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