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update*

A Crucial Difference

Treating dietary supplements as if they were drugs could kill health freedom.

In a recent report, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommended that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) evaluate the benefits of nutritional supplements “with the same rigor” as it evaluates approvals of synthetic drugs. You heard it here first: Attacks on health freedom will continue, and the primary target will be the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA) that helps maintain separation between supplements and drugs. DSHEA is the foundation of health freedom. Once DSHEA is eliminated, your right to take nutritional supplements will crumble into dust.

In 1994, DSHEA preserved our right to take nutritional supplements by classifying supplements as foods. Under this classification, supplements did not require FDA approval. DSHEA struck such a powerful chord with the American public that its passage was impossible to deny—more citizens wrote letters to Congress in support of DSHEA than on any other piece of legislation in US history.

Natural, Not Synthetic

Now the IOM, in suggesting that nutritional supplements be treated like drugs, violates a key DSHEA component. But supplements and drugs are not the same. Supplements are safe and natural. Meanwhile, FDA-approved synthetic drugs kill more than 100,000 people a year, while injuring millions more. Supplements are affordable and accessible; many drugs require a prescription and can be prohibitively expensive.

Is there any reason to heed the IOM’s suggestion that supplements and drugs be placed under the same regulatory umbrella? Despite its official-sounding name, the IOM is not part of the government. It is a non-profit organization boasting a



mission of advising the US on how to improve health. But by suggesting that supplements be treated as drugs, it is clear: When it comes to health, the IOM is giving out bad advice.

Healthcare Nightmare

Can you imagine what would happen if the FDA was empowered to revoke DSHEA and begin treating supplements as drugs? Affordable, easy-to-find vitamins would be ripped from our hands. Supplement companies would go bankrupt trying to match the pharmaceutical giants’ massive scientific studies. Big Pharma would eagerly absorb failing supplement companies, taking advantage of the situation to close local health food stores forever. Your daily multivitamin or vitamin C

could be transformed into a healthcare nightmare requiring a doctor’s prescription, health insurance coverage or significant out-of-pocket expense.

DSHEA clearly delineates between synthetic drugs and natural supplements: Drugs require pre-market approval while natural supplements, rightfully treated as foods, do not. Supplement safeguards, such as Good Manufacturing Practices and Adverse Event Reporting, remain in place, while some manufacturers go even further above and beyond what is required to ensure safety and efficacy. Ultimately, these measures make nutritional supplements among the safest ingestible items available on the market today.

Perhaps even more importantly, nutritional supplements represent, for many Americans, an affordable, self-empowering method of supporting overall well-being. The IOM’s recent recommendation betrays its own purported mission of promoting good health. If the IOM truly seeks to help Americans stay healthy, then it should leave DSHEA’s principles alone and enthusiastically encourage Americans to pursue peak nutritional well-being.

It is up to us to protect DSHEA, just as DSHEA protects our right to take dietary supplements. Visit www.nha2010.com, join the Nutritional Health Alliance and use its resources to contact your local elected officials. Let our government know that the IOM is out of line, that supplements are not drugs—and that DSHEA must be preserved at all costs. ♦

*This editorial is a public service announcement sponsored by the Nutritional Health Alliance (NHA).