



Supplements and quality control

By Jacqueline Fields, MD, founder of Dr. Fields' Sacred Skin | September 15, 2014

The problem of quality assurance in the natural product industry is huge. The industry is inundated with poor quality products and outright fraud. As a physician, this creates a tremendous challenge to assess which products and which companies are safe and effective for our patients.

There are estimated 1,200-1,500 natural product manufacturers in the U.S. now constituting at least a \$25 billion dollar industry. The majority do very little quality assurance testing. Many raw materials for dietary supplements come from China and India where quality problems are notorious. It is not uncommon in this industry to have contaminants such as heavy metals and drug contamination. Not all raw materials from these countries are contaminated and the quality problem is certainly not limited to those countries. These same problems have occurred in Germany, Spain, Mexico and here in the U.S.

So one would think in this industry the FDA or some organization would be monitoring our safety. Unfortunately this is not true.

The FDA was required in 1994 to establish Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) for supplements. It took until 2007 before they finally issued complete regulations on GMP's. The GMP's are milestones for the industry but unfortunately it is very unlikely that the FDA will be able to enforce them or that the manufacturers will voluntarily follow the regulations. Some companies will try to mislead the public about being certified by writing on the product GMP compliant. This does not mean the company has met the certification.

However, certification from the Therapeutic Goods Administration of Australia assures that medicinal products meet the same standards required by the Australian Pharmaceutical industry. Very few U.S. supplement manufacturers that I know of have achieved this TGA certification. Metagenics and some other physician Lines are compliant and hence it is only these types of companies I choose to use in my pharmacy.

As you can see this lack of quality control makes it very critical as a physician that I know what companies are meeting the highest of standards so that when I prescribe a supplement or botanical product, I know I will get the effect I need to treat the disease. Equally as important, I must know I will not harm the patient with contaminants. A classic example is when I need to use fish oils to assist against depression or heart disease. For these diagnoses I may have to prescribe higher doses of fish oils. If they are not quality controlled then the patient may get exposed to a large mercury level that was in the fish.

So for my practice it was critical to create a holistic pharmacy where I know, the nutrients and botanical remedies are of the purest quality, and they are created at the researched dose. This ensures that the therapeutic affect is achieved for the patient. It is not uncommon that a patient might tell me they got a product on line or at the health food store such as niacin or red rice yeast to lower their cholesterol. Then on recheck of their labs they did not improve. Unfortunately then they conclude the natural alternative did not work. Many times it is because the dose or quality of the product was too low or too poor.

I want patients to realize that dis-ease is 90% of the time due to deficiencies, toxicities and poor lifestyle choices. Food is always your first best medicine. I have found by using food extracts, botanicals and high grade supplements I can commonly assist the body that is in a disease state back to health. My last choice as a physician is to use pharmaceutical options because these usually will not correct the disease state but mainly help manage it.

So I hope to extend this service of a holistic pharmacy to the Fort Collins community and to continue to educate them. As you can see, due to the lack of regulations in this industry not all supplements, medicinal and neutraceuticals are of the same quality or effectiveness. The Healing Gardens Store is open to the public. This holistic pharmacy ensures that the data being published in the integrative medicine journals is then translated to the right formula and at the correct therapeutic doses. We also guarantee high quality physician researched products with companies we can trust. Come Visit us on our website at www.thehealinggardens.org or come and see us at 315 Canyon Ave. Fort Collins, or contact us at 940-472-6802.

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