

Editorial

The True Cost of Cynicism

Thursday, November 19, 1992, *New York Newsday* carried a report that vitamin E had decreased the risk of heart disease between one-third and one-half. The studies reported were conducted at the Harvard School of Public Health. In one study, Dr. M. Stampfer found that during an eight year follow-up, women who had taken at least 100 iu of vitamin E daily for two years had a 46 percent lower risk of having a heart attack. This was based on a population study involving 87,245 women. The second study, on men, by Dr. E. Rimm, based upon 51,529 subjects, showed a 37 percent lower risk. They found that there was not enough vitamin E in food; Dr. Stampfer was so convinced by the data he is taking the vitamin himself.

These findings, of course, are not surprising to anyone familiar with the history of vitamin E and heart disease. I suggest that you read Dr. Shute's book. Drs. Wilfred and Evan Shute began to treat large numbers of patients with megadoses of vitamin E, usually above 800 iu daily. Their clinic had experience with perhaps 30,000 patients who came from all over North America to receive their treatment. Their work was a model of clinical research, but the idea was so novel that their work was discounted entirely and they were considered quacks for recommending these doses for a disease "known" not to be a vitamin deficiency disease. Fifty years ago, about the time they began their studies, hardly anyone knew what vitamin E was, and it was not considered important or relevant.

However the medical profession, instead of doing its duty which is to investigate claims made by reputable physicians and scientists, persisted in downgrading their work. In fact, one of the publications with the Harvard name on it, *The Medical Letter*, did a hatchet job on the Shutes' work many years ago. By doing so it effectively killed interest for many decades. In this *Medical Letter* they reviewed four studies published between 1940 and 1950 which they claimed were final definitive studies which proved that vitamin E had no therapeutic value for treating heart disease. I examined the four original papers,

something which few doctors seem to have done. I found them to be inept, and so badly done that even journals willing to publish vitamin papers, would have rejected them. They did not follow the directions described by the Drs. Shute, using too little vitamin E for too short periods of time.

Now scientists from the same university report a 35 to 50 percent reduction in heart disease. It is important to think about this and to convert this into real costs.

Today, 40% of all deaths are caused by heart disease. Each day 2,000 people, or about 750,000 persons per year, die from heart disease. Let us assume that the reduction in risk is exaggerated, and that in reality there is only a 10 percent reduction. This means that each year about 50,000 fewer people would have died, a saving of about 200 patients daily. It is difficult to calculate overall how many would have been saved if the Harvard group had taken their responsibility seriously and examined the vitamin E claims in 1950 instead of waiting until 1992.

This is the real cost of medical cynicism. Had they been merely skeptical they could have done the studies to satisfy their own curiosity, but they were so convinced the Shutes' findings were meaningless they went out of their way to destroy them. They succeeded. I wonder if anyone at Harvard Medical School today has given any thought to the cost of this type of inexcusable delay. This happened several hundred years ago when Sir James Lind proved that citrus fruit could prevent scurvy in British sailors. The Navy began to issue limes 40 years later. In the meantime 100,000 sailors died. This again illustrates the true costs of delay in examining seriously claims made by physicians.

The medical establishment consoles itself by claiming that the onus for proving new findings is on the original investigator. This is merely an excuse for doing nothing. The price is enormous. How much longer will society permit doctors the luxury of doing nothing, especially when the suggested treatments are safe, economical and, in the opinion of doctors who follow these treatments, so effective? Harvard Medical School should be ashamed of itself, and owes the

American people an apology.

The recent Harvard findings illustrate again the rapid advance of the Orthomolecular paradigm in overthrowing the anti-vitamin paradigm — which has done so much harm in the past twenty years.

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