

Comments for ODS Public Meeting
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North Bethesda, MD

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My name is Jon Benninger, and I am the director of business development for Virgo Publishing. We are based in Phoenix, Arizona and we produce trade magazines, trade shows, conferences, websites, databases training programs and other information services for a variety of industries. I specialize in the nutrition and dietary supplement industry. In addition to our magazines HSR:Health Supplement Retailer and Natural Products Industry Insider, we also produce the SupplySide trade shows and the nutrilearn.com online education site.

I am also a board member and president-elect of the non-profit Dietary Supplement Education Alliance. This group is funded by the industry, and our mission is to improve public health by communicating the benefits of dietary supplements. We do this with outreach to media, health care providers, policymakers, and consumers, by funding research, and with many other means of communication.

Between these two roles, I spend a great deal of time thinking about how to communicate with various audiences about dietary supplements. I want to thank ODS for inviting me to share my thoughts today.

I am going to focus my comments on the fifth of the ODS' five major program goals, which is to "expand and conduct outreach activities that inform and educate the public, health care providers, and scientists about the benefits and risks of dietary supplements."

For this meeting, ODS has asked for input about additional needs and new opportunities related to the 2004-2009 Strategic Plan.

My first suggestion is to add "media" to the list of audiences being targeted by ODS' outreach efforts. The media conveys information about supplements to the public regularly, though the information is often inaccurate, incomplete or misleading. ODS should strive to improve the accuracy of media reports related to dietary supplements.

Specific suggestions related to media outreach include:

-- Make simple materials about supplements available to the media. -- Add a press section to the ODS website

- Create a means for media to ask questions of ODS related to supplements.
- Provide information rapidly when a major story related to supplements breaks (for example the recent Vitamin E stories).
- Provide information to media members about how to interpret and report about new research.

Any efforts that ODS can mount to improve the accuracy of media coverage related to supplements will pay dividends in improved public understanding of dietary supplements, and therefore improved public health.

My second suggestion relates to the type of information that ODS provides to the public. I believe that ODS should be more aggressive in disseminating information about those supplements that have an FDA-approved health claim, as well as those supplements that are using a qualified claim for which FDA is exercising enforcement discretion.

I'll use calcium for an example. Calcium supplements can make the health claim of reduced risk of osteoporosis. According to the U.S. Surgeon General's office, 10 million Americans over the age of 50 have osteoporosis and another 34 million are at risk for developing osteoporosis. The Surgeon General also reports that 1.5 million people each year suffer a bone fracture related to osteoporosis, and if current trends continue, one in two Americans over the age of 50 will be at risk for osteoporosis in the year 2020. So, clearly this is a significant and worsening public health problem.

Now I am going to read a direct quote from the Dietary Supplement Fact Sheet on Calcium that is on the ODS website:

"There is a widespread concern that Americans are not meeting the recommended intake for calcium. According to the Continuing Survey of Food Intakes of Individuals (CSFII 1994-96), the following percentage of Americans are not meeting their recommended intake for calcium [3]:

- 0 44% boys and 58% girls ages 6-11 .
- [J 64% boys and 87% girls ages 12-19
- [J 55% men and 78% of women ages 20+"

And from the first ever report on bone health issued by the Surgeon General last faU, these sobering facts:

- About 20 percent of senior citizens who suffer a hip fracture die within a year of fracture.
- About 20 percent of individuals with a hip fracture end up in a nursing home within a year.
- Hip fractures account for 300,000 hospitalizations each year.
- The direct care costs for osteoporotic fractures alone are already up to \$18 billion each year. That number is expected to increase if action to prevent osteoporosis is not taken now.

Clearly, public health would benefit from wider usage of this supplement.

In fact, a study funded by the Dietary Supplement Education Alliance and conducted by The Lewin Group last fall found that the use of calcium and vitamin D supplements by Americans over age 65 could prevent more than 730,000 hip fractures in the next 5 years, resulting in a net reduction in health care expenditures of more than \$13 billion. This is just for hip fractures, not other fractures, and just among Americans over age 65. Those numbers are very big. By increasing awareness of the benefits of calcium supplements and use of these supplements, ODS will be accomplishing the final phrase of the ODS mission statement: "educating the public to foster an enhanced quality of life and health for the U.S. population."

I recommend that ODS collaborate with other stakeholders in public health to mount a clear, wide-reaching campaign to educate Americans about dietary supplements that can help reduce the risk of osteoporosis. And where specific other supplements have authorized FDA health claims, I recommend that similar outreach campaigns be mounted.

In the case of qualified health claims, I believe ODS should mount what we can refer to as qualified public outreach campaigns. As long as the evidence is clearly communicated to the public, I believe ODS will remain true to its commitment to science. This will allow ODS to deliver information to Americans sooner rather than later.

An example of this is the qualified health claim for omega 3 fatty acids and the reduced risk of coronary heart disease. If the evidence supporting this claim is sufficient to warrant a qualified claim, then this information should be communicated to the American public by ODS using the same qualifying language. I recommend that ODS collaborate with other stakeholders in public health to mount a clear, wide-reaching campaign to educate Americans about the possible benefits of omega 3 fatty acids. And where specific other supplements are able to use qualified health claims, I recommend that similar outreach campaigns be mounted.

My third suggestion is to add "government agencies" to the list of audiences being targeted by ODS' outreach efforts. In fact, the language of the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act, the law that created ODS, specifically charges the ODS director with the duty to "provide advice to other Dept of Health and Human Services agencies related to dietary supplements." From the Surgeon General to CDC to FDA and beyond, the government frequently communicates with the public, health care providers and the media about health issues. Sometimes, these communications fail to include information about dietary supplement when it would be appropriate to do so.

As an example, I will use the May 12 press release from the HHS press office headlined "US Surgeon General Marks Bone Health Month." In this press release, the Surgeon General urges health care professionals and patients to redouble their efforts to improve bone health by eating healthy; engaging in weight-bearing exercise, getting tested for bone density, and spreading more information on bone health. All of these are excellent

suggestions. However, throughout this press release, there is no mention of calcium containing dietary supplements. This oversight should be corrected so that future communications about osteoporosis include the clear message that certain dietary supplements can help reduce the risk of this disease.

My fourth suggestion is to place a particular emphasis on outreach to pharmacists. While all health care providers should be informed about the benefits and risks of dietary supplements, pharmacists present a particularly important opportunity. Pharmacists are highly trusted by the public, and often consulted for health advice. Additionally, pharmacists often work in a setting that also sells dietary supplements, which presents a great opportunity for them to discuss this subject with the public. Finally, pharmacists are familiar with prescription and non-prescription drugs. If they were also well versed in the area of supplement-drug interactions and the area of drug-induced nutrient depletions, they could discuss these subjects with the public. For example, Americans taking some prescription drugs to lower their cholesterol may also experience reduced levels of the nutrient co-enzyme Q10. Pharmacists knowledgeable of this could share this information with their customers when appropriate.

It is also a fact that pharmacists are very interested in expanding their knowledge related to dietary supplements. Our magazine, HSR, is intended for owners of health food stores, yet we have more than 4,000 subscribers who are pharmacists. This sector of the health care community wants more information about dietary supplements, and ODS can be a valuable resource for them.

ODS can reach out to our nation's pharmacists through a variety of means, including the web, through the various pharmacist associations, at conferences and through journals that reach pharmacists. Initiatives that improve pharmacists' knowledge of dietary supplements will pay large dividends in improved public health.