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Consumer

(Continued from Page 11) es should know as much as possible about the drugs they buy because every prescription drug carries some degree of potential risk, and surveys indicate that consumers want, and are willing to pay for, this information. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Federal agency responsible for the safety, effectiveness, and labeling of drugs, has recently made a good start in this direction by issuing regulations requiring patient package inserts (PPIs) for 10 commonly-prescribed drugs. While I would have preferred that more drugs be covered, as FDA had originally proposed, this action is a positive first step. (FDA already requires PPIs for a very limited number of drugs, mostly the estrogen drugs.)

By mid-1981, FDA will require manufacturers of the following drugs to tell consumers-in plain English-about the risks. benefits, and side effects of these drugs:

· Ampicillin (a penicillin anti-

biotic used to treat infection). · Benzodiazepines (a group of tranquilizer drugs used to relieve anxiety, such as Librium and Valium).

· Cimetidine (a drug used to help heal intestinal ulcers by decreasing the amount of acid made by the stomach).

· Propoxyphene (a pain reliever: Darvon)

· Methoxsalen (a drug used to treat a condition where patches of skin color are lost). · Phenytoin (a drug used to

control epilepsy or seizure disorders)

· Digoxin (a drug to help the heart beat more strongly or regularly).

· Clofibrate (a cholesterol and triglyceride lowering drug). · Warfarin (an anticoagulant

or blood thinner).

· Thiazide (a diuretic commonly used to treat high blood pressure).

Although FDA believes the language included in the PPIs is clear and the information complete, it would like to receive comments on the label's content from consumers who take these drugs. Therefore, when the PPIs appear in your drug package, you should take the time to analyze their content. Are the labels easy to read and understand? Are the risks and benefits clearly defined? Are the reasons for taking a particular drug completely explained? Are the reasons for not taking the drug just as completely explained? Have consumers experienced any side effects in addition to those listed in the PPIs? Please send your comments to FDA's Bureau of Druga, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, Maryland 20857. Or call 301-443-4893. FDA wants to hear from you; it stands ready to revise the PPIs as necessary to make its program effective.

I still feel strongly that patients should ask their doctors for the drug use information they want, but if that fails, the information is available in the physician leaflets that are prepared for all drugs. There is no law that prohibits the pharmacist from providing the leaflets to consumers although the leaflets may not always be easy to understand. In addition, the same type of information can be found at your local library, in the Physician Desk Reference.

For more information on taking medicines, you may wish to send for a copy of Using Your Medicines Wisely: A Guide for the Elderly. Write to the National Clearinghouse for Drug Abuse Information, P.O. Box 416, ... Kensington, Maryland 20795. Copies of two other publications are available from the Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colorado 81009: Drug Effects Can Go Up in Smoke (585H), and Food and Drug Interactions

Esther Peterson is Special Assistant to the President for Consumer Affairs and Director of the U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs.



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