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Aspartame Recall: A Message Congress Cannot Ignore

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Don't let on that fruits & vegetables improve your health or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will throw you in the slammer. The FDA threatened 29 cherry growers with confiscation and prosecution for revealing on their websites that cherries contain chemicals that reduce arthritic inflammation. The FDA's power-grab logic is: Health claims magically transform food into drugs, requiring FDA approval. So don't say "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" or the FDA will put you away.

Yet, once the FDA blesses a toxic substance, as in the case of Aspartame/NutraSweet/Equal, the toxin can do no wrong and may saturate our food supply unhindered. In 2005, a peer-reviewed, three-year study on 1,800 rats by Dr. Morando Soffritti of the Cancer Research Center of the European Foundation of Oncology & Environmental Sciences confirmed that aspartame is a multi-potential carcinogen, just as the FDA knew and had itself declared some 25 years ago. Yet, the product continues to be sold today in the United States and many other countries.

The FDA Once Fought Aspartame

Twenty-five years ago, a less-compromised FDA fought to keep aspartame off the market because its consumption was linked with brain tumors as well as a long list of other deadly disabilities. In 1977, the FDA even tried to have the manufacturer, G. D. Searle Co., prosecuted for submitting fraudulent tests to get the poison approved. The FDA's then-Chief Counsel asked the Department of Justice to investigate Searle's violations of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FDCA), and the False Reports to the Government Act. This extensive complaint specified the company's "[w]illful and knowing failure to make reports to the FDA" and its "concealing material facts and making false statements in reports of animal studies."

In a study performed upon monkeys, Searle fed NutraSweet to seven simians. Five of them had grand-mal seizures and one died outright, for a casualty rate of

86%. In another study, this time performed upon rats, Searle removed tumors and put cancerous animals back in the study. When they died, Searle resurrected them (on paper) and wrote a phony report. 300 rats were supposedly autopsied in 2 days by one lab worker – impossible!

Caught red-handed, what could Searle do? Hire the prosecutors! Sam Skinner and William Conlon reportedly got deals they couldn't refuse; so they stalled until the statute of limitations was about to expire then switched sides to join the defense lawyers. Put it this way: The Godfather hired the district attorney and the case died – with a lot of us.

Nevertheless, the FDA was determined to act anyway against Searle, so it followed through, and on September 30, 1980, a Board of Inquiry revoked Searle's petition for approval. (Docket No. 75F-0355)

The NSDA Weighs In

Believe it or not, even the National Soft Drink Association (NSDA) also fought aspartame. The Association's long protest can be found in the Senate Congressional Record (5/7/85 at pages S5507-15), which argues that the chemical is illegal because Section 402 of the FDCA provides that a food is adulterated if it contains, in whole or in part, a decomposed substance or if it is otherwise unfit for food. Since the NSDA knew aspartame decomposes in soft drinks, it objected that Searle had not demonstrated to a reasonable certainty that aspartame and its degradation products would be safe for use in soft drinks. If anything, the NSDA argued, aspartame is inherently, markedly, and uniquely unstable in an aqueous media and in soft drinks will degrade as a function of temperature and pH.

The NSDA did, however, omit from its protest the point that upon breakdown aspartame drinks contain the toxic substances methyl (wood) alcohol, formaldehyde, and formic acid (fire ant venom). Stack a rack of diet soda in front of a hot Tucson, Arizona Texaco station and you are making formaldehyde cocktails. Fifteen years later, the Trocho Study in Barcelona showed that formaldehyde accumulates in the cells and damages DNA. Dr. H. J. Roberts, in his medical text *Aspartame Disease*, calls it pre-embalming!

Rumsfeld to the Rescue

But Searle had a dynamic CEO named Don Rumsfeld who promised that he would get it on the market. Four months after the revocation of Searle's petition, he became Reagan's Secretary of Defense. The day after the inauguration, a new FDA Commissioner, Arthur Hayes, was appointed; and he did the dirty deed that no previous Commissioner would stoop to doing when he approved aspartame over the objections of his own Public Board of Inquiry.

Several scientists, who had been overruled when aspartame was approved, resigned in protest. They even alleged that Searle had fabricated results in the testing submitted.

Later, the FDA Commissioner scurried out of his position while under a conflict-of-interest investigation to become a consultant to Searle's public-relations agency. He has not said a peep since. Who ever heard of a public-relations guy who wouldn't talk? Hey, there, Mr. Government Man, we'll make you rich if you bless our plan!

By now the FDA was truly turned, becoming in effect Monsanto's Branch Office in Washington, D.C. Today, the Agency gets more than half of its money from the industries it regulates, serving them instead of us. Said the late FDA toxicologist, Dr. Adrian Gross, in his congressional testimony, "the cancer causing potential of aspartame is a matter established way beyond any reasonable doubt." Yet the FDA ignored its own scientist. If the FDA itself elects to violate the law, then who is left to protect the health of the public?

Yet Doubts Persisted

In l986, the Community Nutrition Institute petitioned the FDA to ban aspartame because it found that many persons were having seizures and going blind from the free methyl alcohol. The FDA refused.

In 1987, the late Dr. Jacqueline Verrett (the FDA toxicologist who had investigated Searle) told Congress that Searle's studies were built on a foundation of sand and that the flawed tests submitted to get FDA approval were a "disaster" that should have been thrown out.

Aspartame/NutraSweet/Equal hit the market, America got sicker, and an avalanche of consumer complaints commenced. The FDA diligently counted and classified these into 92 categories including sexual dysfunction, blindness, four types of seizures and memory loss, and death. Aspartame complaints exceeded those for all other food additives combined. Barely one percent of reactions are reported, so the 10,000-plus complaints actually represent a hidden multitude of injured Americans. Overwhelmed, the FDA began sending the complaints to the AIDS Hotline. Then, still unsatisfied, the FDA slammed the complaint window shut in 1996 and now denies they ever had a list of thousands of complaints. The product, they say, is safe as rain.

Thus, our government watchdog became industry's lapdog with full knowledge of the toxicity, carcinogenicity, and neurodegenerative disabilities this poison brings to the table. Meanwhile, three FDA Commissioners and a parade of its lower executives landed jobs in the aspartame industry. Three Congressional hearings were held because of this outrage. Senator Howard Metzenbaum introduced Senate Bill S.1557, requiring an aspartame moratorium and directing the National Institute of Health to conduct studies on problems appearing in the population from its consumption, including its effects upon the brain chemistry of the unborn and children. Unfortunately, the bill never made it out of committee.

Dr. H. J. Roberts, identified in 1984 as the Best Doctor in the United States by a medical journal, publicly predicted that unless aspartame were removed, we would have a global plague of disabilities and fatalities in 5-10 years. A true prophet, he authored the 1,038-page encyclopedic medical text, *Aspartame Disease: An Ignored Epidemic* with hundreds of case histories. In all, Roberts has authored four books on aspartame.

In 2002, I filed a Citizen's Petition with the FDA, which by law they must answer within six months. After a long delay exceeding six months, I re-contacted the FDA, only to get a brush-off response, essentially saying the Agency had more important things to do. To my mind, though, what could be more important than complying with the law, more important than prohibiting the toxin in children's products or warning pregnant women, or more important than saving lives? The FDA cannot answer me because of the incontrovertible evidence that exists showing that aspartame is poisonous.

Children Are Especially At Risk

Dr. John Olney, founder of the neuroscience field called excitotoxicity, testified on the damage of aspartame to the brains of children: "If a human infant or child sustained hypothalamic damage from glutamate or aspartate, delayed sequelae such as obesity and subtle disturbances in the neuroendocrine status of the individual are the types of effects to be expected and it would not be until adolescence or perhaps early adulthood that such effects would become evident." Now we are plagued with the obesity epidemic he prophesied.

Dr. Olney warned of the damage that this product would do to the unborn and to children. He said that the FDA acknowledged "aspartame had been shown to induce brain damage in neonatal animals" but FDA dismissed the neurotoxicity as irrelevant on grounds that the approved uses of aspartame don't include feeding it to newborn humans. Yet aspartame can be found in prescription and over-the-counter pediatric drugs and in pediatric vitamins. Nursing babies receive this poison from mothers who breastfeed. How gruesome! The recent plague of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, and birth defects manifest the neurologic devastations of aspartame.

Supporting this view, Dr. Louis Elsas, Emory Professor of Pediatrics and Genetics, testified in a congressional hearing that aspartame is a teratogen (causes birth defects) and a neurotoxin.

When the *Miami Herald* quoted the Calorie Control Council, a front group recommending NutraSweet for women during pregnancy and those with liver disease and phenylketonuria, renowned neurosurgeon Dr. Russell Blaylock wrote, "this is the most serious breach of public trust in the history of this nation." The Feingold Association, an organization of ADD people, says the term ADD first came into use around 1981, which curiously enough is when aspartame was approved. All of Drs. Roberts' and Olney's prophecies have come to pass: the damage to the unborn and our children is horrific.

Meanwhile, NutraSweet's manufacturer pumps its propaganda pushing this product upon pregnant women and nursing mothers through, at best, an uninformed media. Aspartame was Monsanto's Cash Cow in thousands of foods, the queen of sweeteners. Coca Cola displayed the NutraSweet swirl on Diet Coke. And little blue packets of Equal adorned millions of tables in the Western world. Every day in every way business got better and better.

Trouble in Paradise

But the "NutraTanic" has hit an iceberg. Europe's largest producer, Holland Sweetener, will jump overboard this December because they are losing money on the product. On top of that, Merisant – America's top producer – lost 29% of their United States sales in 2004 and 2005 and is upside down, capsized, with $100 million more debt than assets. Davy Jones, make room! Two things have brought this well-deserved calamity, one good and one evil:

- ACTIVISM. Hundreds of courageous doctors, publishers, broadcasters, victims, and generous volunteers have for years sounded the alarm that aspartame is death. This unrelenting persistence has persuaded tens, perhaps hundreds, of millions to escape this poison. The word has gone to the ends of the earth, a collective shout that billions of dollars in advertising and campaign contributions cannot suffocate.

- SPLENDA. As the word has spread about aspartame, this newer chemical construct has claimed first place among tabletop toxins. Splenda is a tri-chlorinated sugar, which releases chlorine into our bodies, destroying the immune system and many other vital functions. To my mind, trading Splenda for aspartame is swapping arsenic for cyanide. Be warned.

Clearly, aspartame has seen better days, as shown by the recent comments made by a politician who has carefully studied the public-health impact of this chemical.

The Measure of the Enemy

Several months ago I had the pleasure of meeting with New Mexican State Senator Gerald Ortiz y Pino, who sponsored the recent New Mexico Senate aspartame bill. In trying to limit the unhealthy impact of aspartame, he made the following points:

"Nothing surprises me anymore when it comes to the corrosive influence of money on our public policy. I'm not just talking about the shenanigans inside the beltway of our nation's capitol that Congress is for sale to the highest bidder [, which] has unfortunately become a practically accepted tenet of the American belief system. So accepted is it that the astounding arrogance and venality being revealed by the current scandals in the District of Columbia scarcely produce raised eyebrows, let alone outrage.

"But I'm not just talking about that... Instead, today I'd like to zero-in on the pressure applied to our third level of representative government, the carryings-on that occur in the halls of State Government.....in all its branches.

"And from among at least a dozen recent, painful examples of how big business manages to protect itself from such wet-blanket considerations as the good of the public, I'd like to select one as a representative: the continued approval of the reliance by processed food and beverage manufacturers on the chemical aspartame.

"As an artificial sweetener, one now being added to some 6,000 products, it is difficult for most Americans to not consume aspartame daily. Its safety would seem to be of critical importance to millions of us. But any discussion of this topic has been postponed in New Mexico indefinitely – through influence exerted by representatives hired by the Japanese manufacturer of aspartame, the Ajinomoto Corporation.

"Those well-connected hired hands managed, in December, to frighten the State Environmental Improvement Board (EIB) into backing off of the public hearings into aspartame's safety that they had originally agreed to conduct this coming summer. They managed this delay by challenging the authority of the State of New Mexico to review anything already approved by the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and by threatening to sue the State if we tried to do so. . . . [They also quashed] all attempts to discuss the matter during the just-concluded State Legislature.

"There was one hearing on the subject and it drew significant numbers of the industry lobbyists, all of whom asserted the same party line: The substance is perfectly safe; the Federal Government has looked at it carefully, and who the heck is New Mexico, anyway, to raise any questions about it?

"The committee succumbed, and turned down the measure to ban aspartame 7-2. That half-hour hearing was the total discussion of the matter this year in the public arena in New Mexico, unless the EIB board changes its mind and decides to call Ajinomoto's bluff by going ahead and holding a hearing.

"Twenty-five years [after approval of aspartame], the evidence is mounting that our growing incidence of brain tumors, organ cancers, and neurological diseases has followed the introduction of so many artificially-created additives and chemicals in our food. It's only a matter of time until even Ajinomoto's money won't be able to block the unavoidable link between these unnecessary products and our decline in health.

"When that happens, as it finally did to tobacco and lead and other heavy metals found in gasoline, we will act. The sad thing is that thousands of deaths and ruined lives will occur between now and then. One of the cruel ironies to aspartame is that it was supposed to create sugar-free soft drinks for the benefit of diabetics. Since its introduction, the incidence of diabetes has soared. Some critics link the two."

Efforts to ban aspartame continue around the world. Stephen Fox has worked tirelessly in New Mexico and now New Mexico State Senator Ortiz y Pino has faxed President Bush to pull the plug on aspartame and his letter has also been signed by various members of the New Mexico Legislative Health and Human Services Committee.

Aspartame interacts with drugs and vaccines causing thousands of deaths, but instead of looking for the problem Congress has passed a new law exonerating the pharmaceutical industry from any liability. In the United Kingdom, the Honorable Roger Williams, a member of Parliament, has demanded a ban. And Robin Goodwin petitioned for a ban in the Falklands after his wife sustained a brain tumor and his daughter suffered seizures for 18 years until he found out aspartame was the culprit, and removal stopped the problem. Not wanting to wait for delays due to politics, he simply wrote every single citizen of the Falklands and aspartame products now rot on the shelves.

Congress has failed us in three congressional hearings. Senators like Orin Hatch were given money by Monsanto. Now, Congress has let us down again, giving the pharmaceutical industry a green card to be unconcerned with disability and death because they are no longer liable for any such injuries. Congress should instead echo the courageous words of State Senator Ortiz y Pino, who put the problem of lobbyists and aspartame in vivid perspective.

At the same time, consumer organizations must educate the World as a counter to the blind eye that the FDA has turned to the issue. The FDA has all too easily adopted an anti-health position on aspartame ever since it became the pharmaceutical industry's Washington Branch Office.

If Congress has any interest in the health and welfare of this nation, as well as the World itself, it must seriously consider this issue and take action. Literally every day counts. Congress must wake up, turn away from the debasing effect of the pharmaceutical industry's money, and make the health interests of individuals Congress' paramount concern.

Dr. Betty Martini is the founder of the worldwide volunteer force, Mission Possible World Health International, which is committed to removing aspartame from our food supply. She has an honorary Doctor of Humanities degree for the work she

has done. With 22 years of experience in the medical field, Dr. Martini is uniquely qualified to research and write about aspartame. While working with a hematologist, she supplied the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) with reports on leukemia, which CDC said, were more than all the case histories submitted by the entire Emory University Hospital system combined. And in l970, Dr. Martini established a model for the nation by creating Physicians on Call, a network of five Emergency Care clinics in Atlanta, Georgia, staffed with medical doctors 7 days/24 hours. Services were without cost to the indigent. She also speaks frequently on nationwide radio hookups for talk programs throughout the country. Dr. Martini has three grown children, two sons and a daughter. She may be reached at e-mail address: bettym19@mindspring.com.