

Response to CBC's Recent Article, "Medical journal takes aim at natural remedies"

Prepared by Shawn Buckley, LL.B., president of the Natural Health Products Protection Association (NHPPA) on June 29, 2017.

On June 26, 2017 CBC News published an article called "Medical Journal takes aim at natural remedies". You do not have to read the article to know it is inflammatory. Indeed, even the title is instructive. "Medical Journal takes aim" tells us a "Medical Journal" has sided against natural remedies.

In reality there was a short editorial (yes, editorial) by a medical doctor who clearly does not like natural health products (NHPs). This was not a medical journal taking sides. It was the CBC making an editorial sound newsworthy.

With all that is going on in the world, the first question is: why would the CBC find this editorial newsworthy? I do not have an answer, but I can say that I have become quite alarmed by a steady mainstream media campaign to promote a change to the way natural health products are regulated. The stories mirror Health Canada's current campaign to push for changing how NHPs are regulated (without Health Canada actually revealing the specific changes).

Some parts of the CBC's story are misleading. For example, the story reports:

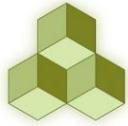
"However, the editorial states that some natural health products are allowed to make claims that have not been tested by Health Canada."

This implies that some NHP claims, unlike chemical drug claims, are not tested by Health Canada. The reality is that no drug claims, be the drug chemical or natural, are tested by Health Canada.

The editorial, and the CBC story, both assume that the evidence requirements for chemical drugs should be applied to NHPs. This first assumption, only makes sense if other assumptions are true, such as:

The assumption that chemical drug standards of evidence are more accurate at showing efficacy than other types of evidence (i.e. double blind clinical trials are the best source of evidence). I can assure you that many who look into this issue, do not make the assumption the CBC or the editorial do. This is a fundamental issue. If this assumption is not true, it should play no part in critical areas such as the regulation of NHPs;

Similarly, even if it is assumed that double blind clinical trials are the best source of evidence for efficacy, there is a further assumption that other types of evidence should not be used to support claims. For greater clarity, there is an assumption that in the critical area of making truthful health claims, all claims except those supported by one type of evidence must be kept from medical practitioners and consumers.



The idea that the only claims allowed are those approved of by Health Canada is in itself quite something. To move to a regime where even Health Canada cannot approve truthful claims based on other forms of evidence is even more concerning;

The assumption that it is reasonable to impose a standard of evidence that will result in truthful health claims being suppressed. NHPs have no intellectual property rights. This means that almost none will be subject to double blind clinical trials as the cost of such trials cannot be recovered. If such evidence is needed for claims, then even obviously true claims such as "oranges treat scurvy" will be banned. Preventing truthful health claims for safe NHPs will not lead to good health outcomes.

The CBC story also reports:

"Health Canada is currently reviewing the regulations that govern the sale of self-care products, including natural remedies. At a recent stop in Toronto, Manon Bombardier, Health Canada's director general of natural and non-prescription health products, said under the current rules, she has no authority to remove a natural remedy that proves to be harming people."

This gives the reader the impression that Health Canada has no tools to protect the public from a natural health product. Anyone who has read my previous articles or Discussion Papers (such as the one on the former Bill C51) will know that Health Canada has ample tools to protect us against NHPs that may be unsafe. This is scare mongering.

What the CBC does not report on are simple facts such as:

- Health Canada cannot point to a single death in all of Canadian history caused by a NHP. Likely Health Canada cannot point to a single case of a NHP even harming people in a serious way;
- A Court case I was involved with found that a company had to defy Health Canada's direction to stop selling as providing access to the product was legally necessary to prevent harm. In that case there was evidence of Health Canada causing death by restricting access to a NHP. Do we want Health Canada to be able to order any recall (be it of a chemical drug or a NHP) without having to involve a Court? When Courts are involved in injunctions or recalls, the risk of removing a product from the market is considered. It might surprise people to find out that Health Canada never takes into account the risk of removing NHPs from the market when they demand a recall. How is it good health policy to give a regulatory body authority to remove products people rely on, sometimes for serious conditions, when that regulatory body does not do a balanced risk analysis to support the removal?;
- An honest appraisal of risk would lead most people to avoid chemical drugs at all costs and to only use NHPs.

We do not, however, have to go to Vegas to figure out what the odds are of any mainstream media outlet running a favourable story about NHPs, or calling for less regulation.



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What this CBC story is helpful in showing, is where the tide is moving. We are seeing a steady stream of such stories. If we accept that there is a method to this, then we can assume that the public is being primed to support the changes Health Canada is telling us are coming. Anyone who believes that they should be able to decide how they are going to prevent or to treat illness, needs to pay attention. Unless action is taken once Health Canada unveils their new regulatory plan for NHPs, you will lose your right to choose. You will have to suffer the illness, but you will not have sovereignty over your own body. You will only be able to do what Health Canada says you can do. May I introduce you to your new Master: Reader, this is Health Canada!