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## About Health Canada

### Letter to the Editor Regarding: "Health Canada: where are the dead bodies," by W. Gifford-Jones (The Telegram - March 4, 2013)

**2013-033**  
**March 8, 2013**

Contrary to the picture painted by Dr. Gifford-Jones, Health Canada recognizes that many Canadians use natural health products (NHPs), and that most of these products are low risk. Recently, Health Canada put forward new tools and pathways to reduce red tape for companies trying to bring NHPs to market, while maintaining consumer safety. As a result, Health Canada has authorized more than 60,000 licenced natural health products (compared with about 8,200 prescription medications).

Simply because an ingredient comes from a natural source does not guarantee it is safe. That is why companies must provide Health Canada with evidence to support the safe use of NHPs. In his letter, Dr. Gifford-Jones mentions nattokinase, a natural ingredient that breaks down blood clots and acts as a blood thinner. Since blood thinners carry a risk of internal bleeding, their health benefits must outweigh this risk. Health Canada contacted companies wishing to sell Nattokinase in Canada to offer the opportunity to provide this evidence. To date, we have not received enough information to support the safe use of nattokinase products. We believe that most Canadians would find this approach reasonable and prudent.

Dr. Gifford-Jones also mentions that Health Canada is "raiding" and "terrorizing" the owners of health food stores, which is wrong. When a risk issue is identified, Health Canada works with the company to address the risk through voluntary action whenever possible. NHP post-market activities focus on situations that pose the greatest risk, such as misleading health claims or adulterated or poorly manufactured products.

Finally, to accuse Health Canada of doing nothing to mitigate the risks with cholesterol-lowering drugs, or to inform the public of those risks, is grossly inaccurate. These risks are both well-labelled and well-communicated.

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