

THE NCAHF BULLETIN BOARD

MARCH / APRIL 2001

The NCAHF Bulletin Board is sent to members and media recipients only. It is intended to stimulate and aid in activism against health fraud, misinformation and quackery at the local, state & national levels.

GRADUATE COURSE ON QUACKERY APPROVED; NCAHF MEETING SCHEDULED

A master's level course, "Health Fraud and Quackery" will be offered this summer at the College of Saint Elizabeth in Morristown, New Jersey. The twelve students who have enrolled will be among the attendees of the NCAHF co-sponsored conference, "Health Care Beyond the Fringe: Schemes and Scams, Pseudoscience and Superstition," which will take place at the College's Mahoney Library Octagon on Saturday, June 23rd from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. They will also complete assigned readings from NCAHF.org and Quackwatch.com, and participate in distance learning discussion forums. The conference program and a registration form were included in the January/February issue of the *NCAHF Bulletin Board* and are now available at NCAHF.org. The NCAHF Annual Membership meeting is scheduled from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the Octagon.

OIG CALLS FDA OVERSIGHT OF DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS INADEQUATE

The US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (OIG) issued a report in April calling the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) dietary supplement adverse event reporting system an inadequate safety valve. According to an FDA-commissioned study, FDA learns of less than one percent of the events that occur. Reports received by FDA lack crucial information such as product ingredients, product labels, medical records, contact information about manufacturers, and contact information about consumers. FDA lacks an adequate computer database for routine analysis, clinical information on supplements, and information about use of supplements by consumers. FDA rarely takes safety actions related to its adverse event reporting system.

OIG recommends that FDA: (1) require dietary supplement manufacturers to report serious adverse events to FDA for some products; (2) contract with Poison Control Centers to obtain their adverse event reports on dietary supplements; (3) inform health professionals and consumers about the adverse event reporting system for dietary supplements; (4) educate health professionals about the importance of including medical information in adverse event reports; (5) require dietary supplement manufacturers to register their products with FDA; (6) require dietary supplement manufacturers to register with FDA; (7) notify manufacturers when FDA receives a serious adverse event report; (8) emphasize to health professionals and consumers the importance of providing a way to identify the alleged injured party; (9) develop a new consumer database to track and analyze adverse event reports; (10) issue guidance on the type of safety information that manufacturers should include in the 75-day premarket notification requirement for some new dietary supplement ingredients; (11) explore the possibility of a monograph system for dietary supplements that would contain safety information on particular ingredients; (12) collaborate with the National Institutes of Health in setting a research agenda addressing safety issues; (13) assist industry and the United States Pharmacopeia in standardizing dietary supplement ingredients, particularly botanicals; (14) expedite the development and implementation of good manufacturing practices for dietary supplement manufacturers; and (15) disclose more useful information to the public about dietary supplement adverse events.

Joseph Levitt, head of FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition told a House Government Reform Committee in March that Congress earmarked a budget of only \$6 million for its dietary supplements program and that full implementation of the Dietary Supplements Health and Education Act could take up to 10 years. The dietary supplement industry estimates that it had \$16 billion in sales last year.

VA SURGEON PRESSURES VETERANS CANTEEN SERVICE TO STOP SUPPLEMENT SALES

Dr. Steven L. Zeitzew, orthopedic surgery chief at the Veterans Administration medical Center West Los Angeles wrote to local and national VA officials in October objecting to sales by the Veterans Canteen Service of over-the-counter herbal medications, vitamins, and minerals: "The Veterans' Canteen Service is selling untested herbal preparations and inappropriate vitamins alongside a small selection of over the counter medications on the main floor of our hospital, adjacent to the cafeteria. My goal is that our patients not be saddled with the burden of paying for or suffering from ineffective, disproved or even harmful therapies. Some of these preparations are of no value, others potentially dangerous, or may interact with common prescription drugs...I urge you to take action to prevent the further sale and promotion of these products."

All of VA's medical centers have Canteen Service shops. VA employees have expressed concerns similar to Dr. Zeitzew's about supplement sales in several other facilities.

Jim Donahue, national director of the Veterans Canteen Service, said the products were removed until the VA's national policy board works out a stance on sales of "alternative" remedies.
[Source: U.S. Medicine: The Voice of Federal Medicine, January 2001.]

CPSC ACTS AGAINST SIDS RISK REDUCTION CLAIMS FOR MATTRESSES AND PADS

In March the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) warned against using baby mattresses and mattress pads claimed to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Advertising and marketing for Baby Air (Breatheable Mattress), Breathe Easy Vented Infant Sleeping Surface, Sleep Guardian Sleeping Pad, and Sleep Safe Mattress Cover encouraged placing babies to sleep on their stomachs. CPSC announced that, due to its efforts, these mattresses and mattress pads are no longer manufactured or distributed. It requested that retailers stop selling the products and remove them from store shelves.

The SIDS death rate has declined by about 38 percent in the five years since the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended that babies be placed on their backs to sleep. CPSC recommends cribs that meet current safety standards with firm, tight-fitting mattresses and no soft bedding.

[See <http://cpsc.gov/cpscpub/perel/prhtml00/00079.html>.]

PUBLIC HEALTH CURRICULUM FOR CHIROPRACTORS FORTHCOMING

Members of the Chiropractic Health Care section of the American Public Health Association are working with representatives of the School of Public Health at Yale University, the Association of Chiropractic Colleges, the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners,

and seven chiropractic colleges to develop a model course on public health that will be submitted to the nation's 16 chiropractic colleges. A cooperative agreement from the Health Resources and Services Administration through the Association of Schools of Public Health supports this curriculum development project, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.

[Source: *The Nation's Health*, March 2001, p. 8.]

NCCAM EXPLORES OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION WITH INDUSTRY

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) at the National Institutes of Health announced a May 14 colloquium for: (1) industrial stakeholders that produce, label and market complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapeutics; and (2) organizations that develop and apply standards to determine quality and safety of CAM products.

The goals announced for the colloquium were: (1) to begin a dialogue regarding how NCCAM and industry can work together to definitively evaluate CAM therapeutic products for composition, safety, and efficacy; and (2) To obtain input from the broad stakeholder community.

Issues to be addressed include: (1) studying CAM therapeutics within the context of the NIH mission; (2) scope of interests and needs of the CAM therapeutics industry in developing and marketing CAM therapeutics; (3) areas of interest common to NCCAM and the CAM therapeutics industry; (4) areas of complementary expertise contributed by NCCAM and the CAM therapeutics industry; and (5) regulatory authorities and responsibilities of other Federal agencies.

Among the speakers listed on the draft agenda are representatives of Pfizer, Inc., the American Herbal Products Association, Nutricia/Rexall Sundown, and the Council for Responsible Nutrition (which represents manufacturers and distributors of supplements and other nutritional products). The only consumer organization represented on the agenda is the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

Comment: What's good for the bottom line of supplement pushers has nothing to do with what is good for consumers. NCCAM has not explored opportunities to collaborate with critics (such as NCAHF) of promoting quackery as "CAM."

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS ISSUES POLICY ON CAM

A policy on "Counseling Families Who Choose Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Their Child with Chronic Illness or Disability" issued by the Committee on Children with Disabilities of the American Academy of Pediatrics in the March 2001 issue of *Pediatrics* [107(3):598-601] advises pediatricians to evaluate the scientific merits of specific therapeutic approaches, identify risks or potential harmful effects and provide families with information on a range of treatment options. According to the policy, "dilemmas may arise when families ask their pediatrician to endorse or to provide a therapy that is considered by the pediatrician not to be in the best interests of the child. There may be evidence of the possibility of direct harm, unknown risks, or concerns about indirect harm to the child." The policy also recommends that doctors find positive methods for communicating with families in order to convey sensitivity and

concern for the family's perspective, and to offer to assist in monitoring and evaluating the patient's response if the CAM approach is endorsed.

SKEPTICAL INQUIRER LAUNCHES PROGRAMS ON DISCOVERY SCIENCE CHANNEL

A new *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine series of 3-minute "interstitial" programs appearing frequently throughout the daily schedule of Discovery Science Channel will address such paranormal and pseudoscience topics as acupuncture, homeopathy, and magnet therapy. The host of the series is William B. Davis of X-Files fame.

JOHN EDWARD INVESTIGATED BY SKEPTICS

John Edward is the author of the *One Last Time: A Psychic Medium Speaks to Those We Have Loved and Lost* and the novel *What If God Were the Sun?* On his nightly program on the Sci Fi Channel, *Crossing Over with John Edward*, he appears to convince people in his audience of his ability to communicate with their dear, departed loved ones. He charges \$300/hour for private readings. His popular audiotapes include *Understanding Your Angels and Meeting Your Guides*, *Unleashing Your Psychic Potential*, and *Developing Your Own Psychic Powers*.

A February 28th broadcast of *Inside Edition* about John Edward showed that you don't need to develop psychic powers to convince others that you can communicate with the dead. The segment reporter convinced 5 out of 7 people that he had psychic ability. He did so by applying the techniques of "cold reading" taught to him by magician and skeptic James Randi. The routine involves stating guesses to the bereaved. Once the bereaved finds a link to a guess, the reader follows up with clever suggestions or questions to extract information without appearing to have asked for it. Those anxious to hear from the deceased often do not realize that they and not the reader supply the important information.

In an article published in the March 5th issue of *Time* magazine, Leon Jaroff, a critic of pseudoscience, described the suspicions of Michael O'Neill who was once in the *Crossing Over* audience and wound up receiving a reading from John Edward consisting of more "misses" than "hits." When the show appeared on television weeks after the taping, O'Neill saw himself nodding yes after statements by John Edward with which he remembers disagreeing. Misses had been edited out of the program. He recalled that before the show John Edward's aides struck up conversations with audience members and asked them to fill out cards with information about their families. O'Neill believes the information was forwarded to John Edward and that John Edward's staff monitored conversations of audience members waiting before the show.

In a letter to *Time* published in the March 26th issue, the show's executive producer Charles Nordlander wrote: "No information is given to John Edward about the members of the audience with whom he talks. There is no eavesdropping on gallery conversations and there are no 'tricks' to feed information to John."

Please send items of possible interest to NCRHI members for *The Bulletin Board*, or for readers of the *NCRHI Newsletter* to NCRHI, P.O. Box 141, Fort Lee, NJ 07024; Provide clear (not Fax) copies suitable for photocopying, and complete references for citation purposes.