

'Stop Codex' - Rath Protests Plans For Supplements

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The Nutrition Committee of Codex Alimentarius, an international standard-setting body of the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization, is deliberating harmonized worldwide guidelines for vitamin and mineral supplements in Bonn, Germany this week, starting Monday, 1 November. The proposal goes back ten years and was introduced by the German delegation to the committee. At the time the text seemed extremely restrictive, prompting me to comment in a rather critical way. Since then, the proposal has inched its way through the legislative machinery of the international agency. A major change was to advocate "scientific risk assessment" instead of RDA dosage limits for vitamins and minerals, but detractors say that the rules are a ploy to drastically limit supplement use.



Pro-supplements protest at Codex assembly, Bonn

By far the most vociferous critic is a German medical doctor Matthias Rath who says that vitamins, if used properly in combination with other nutritional elements, could practically wipe out heart disease and prevent a number of other degenerative illnesses. Two British researchers, Steve Hickey and Hilary Roberts agree. They argue that vitamin C in high doses could be used to prevent and fight heart disease, infections and even cancer, if only used in proper dosage. They strongly challenge the science behind RDAs, the recommended dietary allowances, which are set at 60 to 90 milligrams a day, depending on what country you live in. Vitamin C in fact strengthens the collagen fibres that make up a good part of our body structure. Collagen also ensures the flexibility of

blood vessels and supplying the nutrient in copious amounts is said to have a protective effect.

Dr. Rath has worked closely with Linus Pauling, the double nobel laureate who advocated use of vitamin C in dosages of several grams a day - Pauling died some years ago at age 92. When Rath first discovered that vitamin C could potentially eliminate heart disease, his first trip was to Switzerland, to offer the discovery to Roche, one of the principal producers of vitamin C. He says he was told that the proposal would interfere with drugs being introduced at the time. In fact, statin drugs have become a huge source of revenue for pharmaceutical giants, netting the companies billions of dollars every year. Lipitor, one of these drugs, is an absolute blockbuster drug, but it is plagued with important side effects - muscle pains and in some cases a breakdown of tissue leading to death.

Close to city of Bonn, the former capital of Germany, where the Codex deliberations are hosted by the German government, several hundred of Rath's supporters gathered to protest the proposed limitations on vitamin and mineral availability on the eve of the deliberations. Such protests are almost a fixture that characterizes the yearly meetings as much as the diversity of delegates, who come from every continent.

Charging that pharmaceutical companies profit from the continuation of disease, rather than providing the nutrients needed to prevent health problems, Rath painted a provocative history of big pharma, linking the IG Farben chemical cartel to World War II as well as to more recent armed conflicts.

On Monday, Rath supporters staged a street demonstration sporting colored balloons and angry speeches, calling on several hundred delegates from some 50 countries to abandon plans to control nutritional substances. "Health is a human right" and "Stop Codex" were slogans, chanted outside the conference center, provoking one pharma delegate's reaction: "This man is a criminal. He gives people false hope, making millions in the process. We would love to supply all those vitamins, but the science just does not support what Rath claims. We have studied vitamins and they just don't work in the way we hoped they would."

Certainly there is a clash of opposing philosophies, if not personalities. But we may yet find out who is right - because the Codex guideline, which may pass the Committee today, does mandate a review of vitamin science. Risk assessment will have to examine both sides of the coin, not only the potential dangers but also the claimed benefits. So while finding out whether vitamins are indeed as safe as many consumers and doctors say, we might also find some surprising news about their effectiveness in keeping us healthy.

Stay tuned.