



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
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"Darvon: the worst drug in history?"

Lawyers are now advertising on television for viewers to join in on a class action law suit against the makers of Darvon (propoxyphene) and Darvocet. They claim that it caused heart arrhythmias that led to heart attacks. Back in 2008, I told you that Darvon, Darvon-N and Darvocet were considered to be too risky to be left on the open drug market and a group called Public Citizen was suing the Food and Drug Administration, calling propoxyphene no more effective than safer painkillers and they cited the accidental deaths of more than 2,000 people since 1981. Darvon (propoxyphene) was one of the most widely prescribed generic drugs in the USA, with 22 million prescriptions filled in 2007 and it was sold by numerous generic manufacturers and was considered a relatively mild painkiller. Actually, research studies have found that ibuprofen worked better than propoxyphene for most kinds of pain. In addition to addiction and cardiac side effects, Public Citizen's Dr. Sidney Wolfe opined that it had been deemed inappropriate for the elderly because of sedation and confusion that increased risk of falls and fractures. As of 2011, an estimated 10 million patients have used propoxyphene, which was approved by the FDA in 1957. The strongest statement I have read against Darvon was told to *Medscape Medical News* by Ulf Jonasson, doctor of public health from the Nordic School, who said, "Propoxyphene is the worst drug in history. No single drug has ever caused so many deaths." Dr. Edwardo Fraifeld, president of the American Academy of Pain Medicine, agreed with Jonasson. It was banned in the United Kingdom 5 years ago because of its risk for suicide. Darvon was apparently a drug which was ineffective, addictive and toxic. How many other drugs possibly fit into this category and which of these has killed the most people?

In the America that I love, I have cautioned you to take only those medications that you truly need and to take the lowest doses and take them for the shortest period of time. Trust me, Darvon is not an isolated case and the only medication in this category. Also, if this can occur with drugs which are "rigorously tested," what about all of the dietary supplements which are not required to undergo any testing? Please choose carefully the medicines and supplements that you take and those that you give to loved ones. Prescription drugs should never be given by a lay person to another lay person, especially to someone who has had a history of drug abuse or addiction and we should keep all medications in a secure place where others cannot get to them. If you have medication doubts, please always consult your physician.

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