



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
September 19, 2011

"Kids Being Pushed On More Drugs"

To paraphrase, a past CEO of the pharmaceutical industry stated, "It was their goal to have as many citizens as possible on medicines every day." Drug makers do not like products which are taken for just a few days or a week or so. They want the long term profits associated with the life long dependency on their drugs. This gives maximal financial returns to the stock holders and the largest bonuses to the officers. In 2007, the multibillion dollar cholesterol lowering statin drugs were being taken by about 60 million Americans. Drug companies aggressively market these block buster drugs to allegedly save you from hardening of the arteries. In 2009, the statin drugs had over \$17 billion in sales and they have pushed the market to include kids. Yes, kids! In 2010, Pfizer pushed the European Union to approve a new chewable form of the cholesterol blockbuster, Lipitor, for children 10 years and up with high levels of bad cholesterol and triglycerides. Lipitor is the world's top-selling drug but its U.S. patent expires at the end of November 2011; so, the company has been trying to boost sales where possible before then. As in the United States, the European Union allows drug makers to seek an additional six months of patent protection for medications if they test them in children, who generally are excluded from the drug studies performed to win approval for a new medication. Pfizer already won such an extension for its crucial U.S. patent on Lipitor and this extension can easily bring hundreds of millions of dollars in additional revenue. Perhaps we should give a little education to the parents on exercise and proper diet and stop with this insanity. Our bodies need cholesterol to make hormones, vitamin D, enzymes that digest food and it is an integral part of cell membranes and neuron structure. Now, in September of 2011, the drug makers are targeting kids for antihypertensive medications. And they are pushing to change the definition of what qualifies as being hypertensive and have created a group called, "prehypertensives." Drug companies want to increase their market. Fortunately, some experts believe that considering healthy kids for pharmacologic therapy just doesn't make sense. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute in 2004 defined prehypertension in kids as a top blood pressure number between 120 and 139 or a bottom number between 80 and 89. High blood pressure starts at 140 over 90. According to the new definition, just one blood pressure measurement above normal would put a kid in the "at-risk" group.

In the America that I love, we will resist the strong, pharmaceutical marketing forces driving to injudiciously push drugs on our children. Enough is enough.

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