FTC tightens up on Homeopathic products

By Julianna LeMieux — November 17, 2016

Homeopathic products are a scam. They are sold for almost any ailment imaginable and, collectively, people are willing to spend several billions of dollars a year on them despite any evidence that they are effective.

Almost thirty years ago, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) decided that homeopathic products could be sold over the counter (OTC) without going through FDA approval - as long as they were 1) labeled as homeopathic and 2) that the ingredients can be found in the 'homeopathic pharmacopeia' - a database of homeopathic compounds.

But, the marketing world of homeopathy hit a hiccup this week that may result in a change in the industry. The Federal Trade Commission released an 'Environmental Policy Statement on Marketing Claims for OTC Homeopathic Drugs.' In it, they state several changes to how homeopathic products must be labeled for marketing.

The FTC is putting into motion their authority to "prohibit unfair or deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce, such as deceptive advertising or labeling of OTC drugs."

The most important lines from the statement are,

- "In summary, there is no basis under the FTC Act to treat OTC homeopathic drugs differently than other health products. Accordingly, unqualified disease claims made for homeopathic drugs must be substantiated by competent and reliable scientific evidence."

What this means is that the homeopathic product must convey to consumers that there is no scientific evidence that suggests that the product works and that homeopathy is not accepted by medical experts.

One of the hallmarks of a homeopathic remedy is that it is diluted down to such an extreme level
that there is almost none of the compound left in the substance.

Although I am glad that the FTC is taking a stand against homeopathic products, I am not sure that it will have an effect. I imagine that most people who buy homeopathic products are probably aware that science is not backing them, and do not care. In fact, to the people who subscribe to homeopathy - having an anti-science claim on the bottle may even make it more appealing.

It's like when you were a teenager, and you were intrigued by the hot guy in your class who was a troublemaker. But, after your parents told you that dating him would be a bad idea - you immediately asked him out.

As we have written [3] about in the past, homeopathic products are not only not effective - they can be harmful. The FDA stepped in regarding homeopathic teething products amidst an investigation that they were the cause of ten infant deaths - recommending that they not be used. They have since been pulled from many drugstore shelves, although not all. This recent move by the FTC is a step in the right direction. Hopefully, with more steps, these useless and sometimes dangerous products will get more attention from regulatory agencies and end up where they belong - in the trash.

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