

Delicious Irony - GNC Files For Bankruptcy Because of COVID



By Josh Bloom — June 25, 2020

GNC, the giant dietary supplement company that has been selling questionable health products for 85 years, apparently had no "remedy" for COVID. The company is filing for bankruptcy, due in large part to the pandemic. A little bit of irony for your Friday.



Got No Cash

It's no secret that I'm no fan of dietary supplements. Neither is my colleague Dr. Henry Miller, one sharp guy, who used to be the Director of the FDA's Office of Biotechnology.

Together, we have written a number of opinion pieces that are sharply critical of the supplement industry. The most recent was in *Issues and Insights* last year: [Will Dangerous Dietary Supplements Finally Be Reined In?](#) ^[1].

Some key points:

- Dietary supplements are big business. [Three out of four Americans take one or more](#) ^[2] on a regular basis.
- Out-of-pocket expenditures for herbal and complementary nutritional products are about \$50 billion per year. (For all you critics of the greedy pharmaceutical industry, note that Pfizer, the world's biggest drug company [earned about \\$52 billion](#) ^[3] in 2019).
- One of the great hoaxes perpetrated on health-conscious American consumers is the hype and outright fraud of dietary supplements that don't work and are sometimes dangerous.
- The hoax was made possible 25 years ago by politically driven legislation that bizarrely

defined those products as food. With the passage of the Dietary Supplements Health and Education Act of 1994 (DSHEA) science went out the window.

DSHEA is as slippery as an eel in a vat of WD-40. It gave supplement companies the right to both *claim and deny* the utility of a product. Dr. Miller and I wrote (emphasis mine):

*Although the law prohibits supplements from being marketed for the treatment or prevention of disease – which would make them subject to regulation as drugs – this restriction is widely ignored, as any viewer of TV ads can attest. The marketers of these products evade the mandate simply by playing word games: Instead of claiming that a product treats, controls or cures a condition (which would subject it to onerous regulation as a “drug”), **they simply substitute the term “supports,”** as in “supports the immune system” or “supports heart (or brain or prostate) health.” **If they add a pro forma disclaimer – “This statement has not been evaluated by the FDA. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease” – it seems they can get away with anything.***

- A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and FDA researchers analyzed representative surveillance data from 63 hospital emergency departments over a 10-year period (2004-2013). The statistical analysis projected about 23,000 emergency room visits annually resulting from the ingestion of supplements; “Such visits commonly involve cardiovascular manifestations from weight-loss or energy products among young adults and swallowing problems, often associated with micronutrients, among older adults.”

OK, you get it. For the most part, the supplements industry is a sham, and if there's a bigger name in the industry than General Nutrition Centers (GNC) I've never heard of it.

The irony of GNC going under, at least in part, due to the COVID outbreak is almost funny. The business was based on the concept that "real" medicines are dangerous but herbal or dietary supplements are (wink wink) helpful while also being safe. Both are nonsense. But this isn't:

In 2020 the FDA issued letters to 17 companies sanctioning them for making unsubstantiated claims that their products can help prevent or treat COVID. GNC was **not** one of these companies. Here are [six of](#) ^[4][the "remedies"](#) ^[5] that sleazebag companies were cited by the FDA **(1)**:

- Colloidal silver
- Essential oils
- CBD oil
- Grapefruit seed extract
- Homeopathic drug products
- Iodine

And by nothing less than an astounding coincidence, here are six products from the GNC website...

Selected Products from the GNC Website



Colloidal Silver



Essential Oils



CBD oil



Grapefruit extract



Arnica (homeopathic water)



Iodine detox solution

Well, I'll be damned! Six of the products that the FDA cited as sham treatments for COVID are sold by GNC. It is important to note that **GNC had nothing to do with the sale of useless products for COVID**. Nope, they just sell/sold the same products that are **useless for other maladies**.

- Colloidal silver - "[A] dietary supplement with over 30 ppm per serving of 99.999% pure colloidal silver to support and maintain a healthy immune system.*"
- Essential oils - "[P]romote peace and tranquility whenever and wherever they're needed most."
- CBD oil - "An infusion of our classic full spectrum CBD concentrate into a soothing body oil that moisturizes and keeps skin hydrated. A calming and balancing blend for mind and body."
- Grapefruit extract - No claims
- Arnica (a "homeopathic drug product") - Temporarily relieves the pain and stiffness of injuries, sprains and muscle aches due to injuries.
- Iodine - "Nutritionally supports the thyroid. Supports normal metabolism"

Finally, it should come as no surprise that ACSH has had plenty to say about GNC in the past. Here are some examples.

- [GNC: Good Night Conmen](#) [6]
- [NFL Correctly Banned GNC's Super Bowl Commercial](#) [7]
- [ACSH on Law and Order? We work with the NY Attorney General on supplement reform.](#) [8]
- [Is GNC an Essential Service?](#) [9]

That's all for now, folks. Please don't be sad. GNC may be going to the big herb garden in the sky,

but it's only 289 days until [World Homeopathy Day](#) [10]. We'll see you then.

NOTE:

(1) [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Update: FDA Continues to Combat Fraudulent COVID-19 Medical Products](#) [11], May 7, 2020.

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Links

[1] <https://issuesinsights.com/2019/04/23/will-dangerous-dietary-supplements-finally-be-reined-in/>

[2] <https://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/ucm631065.htm>

[3] <https://www.thepharmaletter.com/article/annual-revenue-of-top-10-big-pharma-companies>

[4] <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/health-fraud-scams/fraudulent-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-products>

[5] <http://www.fda.gov/consumers/health-fraud-scams/fraudulent-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-products>

[6] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2016/05/03/gnc-good-night-con-artists>

[7] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/02/06/nfl-correctly-banned-gncs-super-bowl-commercial-10827>

[8] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2015/03/30/acsh-on-law-and-order-we-work-with-the-ny-attorney-general-on-supplement-reform>

[9] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/03/31/gnc-essential-service-14676>

[10] <https://www.news18.com/news/india/world-homeopathy-day-2020-theme-history-importance-and-more-2572847.html#:~:text=To%20pay%20a%20tribute%20to,as%20the%20founder%20of%20homoeopathy.>

[11] <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-continues-combat-fraudulent-covid-19-medical-products>