

More Nonsense From Nature Nuts

By ACSH Staff — July 18, 2012

I couldn't let this one go by. Just too slanted and inaccurate. And it's all over the news today.

"Aspirin Isn't a Wonder Drug," is a fine piece of science fiction by "The People's Chemist," Shane Ellison. Ellison also wrote "Over-The-Counter Natural Cures." His credentials, such as they are, consist of a Masters degree in organic chemistry .

Sounds impressive, but it really isn't. Pretty much anyone with the intellectual capacity of plankton can get one.

Thus, it is not surprising that his statements that are carried by multiple news organizations are off scale in their wrongness . Here are some of them:

"Big Pharma didn't invent aspirin. Mother Nature did,"
No she didn't. Aspirin exists nowhere in Nature.

"Thousands of years ago, humans witnessed injured bears gnawing on the bark of white willow trees and people have been using that natural remedy for thousands of years."

So? Thousands of years ago people believed that the sun circled the earth (which was flat), lightning was caused by angry gods, lead could be converted into gold, and drilling a hole in your head would relieve migraine headaches. Thousands of years ago you lived to be thirty and then something ate you.

"White willow bark doesn't contain ASA (acetyl-salicylic acid) or aspirin. Therefore, it won't accidentally kill you.

No it doesn't. It contains salicin, which is converted to salicylic acid upon ingestion. That can kill you. Salicylic acid is almost always used almost topically--for acne, dandruff and warts. But it is also the active ingredient in Doan's Pills, which are supposed to help with back pain. Here are the warnings from the bottle:

- chest pain, severe dizziness, shortness of breath, slurred speech, problems with vision or balance;
- sudden numbness or weakness, especially on one side of the body;
- feeling like you might pass out;
- black, bloody, or tarry stools;

- coughing up blood or vomit that looks like coffee grounds;
- blood in your urine, urinating more or less than usual;
- hearing problems, ringing in your ears;
- swelling, rapid weight gain;
- easy bruising or bleeding, unusual weakness, fever, chills, sore throat, flu symptoms;
- fast or pounding heartbeats;
- severe stomach pain, ongoing nausea or vomiting; or
- dark urine, jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes).

Great stuff. And--it barely works. Aspirin is about five times more potent than salicylic acid for pain and fever relief.

"Trash aspirin, use white willow bark and hawthorn," he said.
No. Trash the article.

"The industry couldn't market the natural ingredient as their own. You can't patent Mother Nature." *More nonsense. You might not be able to patent all of Mother Nature, but you can certainly patent the use, isolation, and methods of purification of synthesis of any useful drug that is obtained from her. Many chemotherapy drugs are plant-derived drugs. They were patented.*

To have a monopoly, they had to alter it a bit. Chemist Carl R. Gerhardt was the first to do so in 1853. He created a molecular cousin and named it ASA (acetyl-salicylic acid). Bayer trademarked it as aspirin in 1889.

Yes--Bayer altered it. To make it work. And the correct name for ASA is acetylsalicylic acid. No hyphen.

"The small molecular change made for big dangers," he said. "Like deflating a tire, aspirin depletes the body of life-saving nutrients."

Sure. People all over the world are starving because they took Bufferin. Speaking of which, wouldn't this make a great TV show? "Bufferin the Vampire Slayer."

I think I'll patent that.

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