

Deceptive letter day at the New York Times

By ACSH Staff — June 18, 2013

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Today's New York Times had a pair of letters which contained some of the most brazen misinformation bordering on plain deception that we here at ACSH have ever witnessed.

The first one came from a John S. Shaw, the Executive Director and Chief Executive of the [Natural Products Association](#) [2], writing from D.C. In an attempt at a response to ACSH Trustee Dr. Paul Offit's Times magazine article, [Don't Take Your Vitamins](#) [3], Mr. Shaw issues the following laugh: Dietary supplements are fully regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, and the agency has repeatedly said it possesses the tools it needs to successfully oversee the industry. Excuse me?

Dr. Bloom adds, The only thing wrong with Shaw's statement is, well, everything. Dietary supplements are regulated just as well by the FDA as they are by the National Transportation Safety Board, the United States Bocce Federation, and Audubon Society. I guess anyone can make an honest mistake.

Shaw also somewhat disingenuously notes that millions of Americans fail to get their needed vitamins from their diets, and that vitamin supplements have been taken safely for many years.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross had this to say: How would Mr. Shaw know that, since no one collects data on adverse effects of supplements. Why should anyone, since contrary to his ridiculous assertion the FDA has been thoroughly restrained from regulating any but the most egregious toxins and contaminants in natural supplements by the 1994 DSHEA law. And who in the FDA proclaims that they are content with that absence of oversight? Nowhere in his short letter does Shaw counter Dr. Offit's examples (about seven of them, as I recall) of adverse effects of safe and natural vitamins.

Not to be outdone, the Chairman of the Board of CASAColumbia (a center specializing in research into addiction and substance abuse based at Columbia University), wrote in to express his concern about the likelihood (to his perspective) of e-cigarettes seducing, at the behest of course of Big Tobacco companies, youngsters into a [lifetime of nicotine addiction](#) [4]. The writer (Jeffrey B. Lane by name) asserts based on zero evidence that e-cigs are 'Big Tobacco's next cash cow' and that flavorings of the product are clearly meant to attract children and could not possibly have a role in helping addicted adult smokers use the device to get off deadly cigarettes and their toxic, carcinogenic smoke. He wrote to criticize the excellent [overview of e-cigs in The Times](#) [5] recently.

Again, Dr. Ross has little patience for such misleading sophistry: To a hammer, everything looks

like a nail. To an addiction specialist, I guess everything looks like a hook to trap the unwary. What Lane and his anti-harm reduction allies never, ever mention is the sad, inconvenient fact of 45 million addicted American smokers, of whom well over 400,000 will die prematurely due to their craving. Why? Because the substance they abuse, nicotine, is delivered in the most toxic product known to man, cigarettes. Electronic cigarettes deliver the nicotine safely, or almost so. Ignoring that fact to rail about baseless fears of kids getting hooked while consigning smokers to their doom with patches and gum that don't work is not beneficial for public health. Mr. Lane should keep his mouth (or pen) shut when he avoids the facts about what he is supposedly an expert on.

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