Green coffee means more green for Dr. Oz, but considerably less for the company that sold the junk

By ACSH Staff — October 21, 2014

As you well know, at ACSH, our job is to talk about and reveal junk science. This is usually not especially difficult, since the same set of errors that make junk science junk appear over and over.

In the following case, not especially difficult became ridiculously easy, since virtually every aspect of the junk involved was handed to us on a silver platter. It doesn’t get any better than this made up data, woefully inadequate peer review, and Dr. Oz, which puts this episode into the Hall of Shame without the obligatory five-year waiting period. Or longer if you’re Pete Rose.

A paper [1] that appeared in 2012 in *Diabetes, Metabolic Syndrome and Obesity: Targets and Therapy* claimed that consumption of green coffee bean extract caused overweight people to lose a substantial amount of weight, even without any changes in their diet or exercise routine.

Let’s just say that the paper, co-authored by Joe Vinson and Bryan Burnham of the prestigious University of Scranton was imperfect.

Applied Food Sciences, Inc., a Texas-based supplement company, really wanted evidence that their product, Green Coffee Antioxidant (GCA), had the ability to induce weight loss and reduce body fat.

It did, but not before the following took place:

- Applied Food Sciences (AFS) originally paid a researcher in India to conduct clinical trials and publish the results.
- Their paper was (miraculously) rejected.
- AFS then hired Vinson and Burnham to rewrite the paper and get it published
- *Diabetes, Metabolic Syndrome and Obesity: Targets and Therapy* took the bait and published the study in 2012
- Dr. Oz became enamoured with the product. So much so that the show could have been renamed The Buy GCA and You Will Turn Into Brad Pitt Show.
- Dr. Oz got ripped to shreds [2] by Senator Claire McCaskill in a congressional hearing on the
safety of dietary supplements. Also, ACSH’s Dr. Josh Bloom had a few unflattering things to say about this unseemly incident on Science 2.0

- It turned out that the data from India was made up, and Vinson and Burnham withdrew their paper, as reported by Retraction Watch.
- AFS was relieved of 3.5 million of their favorite dollars by the Federal Trade Commission.
- Aside from this, everything worked out fine.

Dr. Bloom says, I came in today and got paid to write this up. I should really give back my prorated salary for today, because this thing wrote itself. But, this incident is actually quite educationally valuable, since it highlights the ridiculous abuses that companies like AFS are allowed to get away with thanks to the 1994 Hatch Act, which permits companies to sell untested and unapproved drugs by calling them supplements.

The overarching message here is that the lack of credible clinical trials is poisoning science. Nowhere is this better discussed than in Science 2.0 founder Hank Campbell’s July 2014 editorial in the Wall Street Journal entitled The Corruption of Peer Review Is Harming Scientific Credibility.

Some key points that Campbell makes include:

- Replication is a fundamental tenet of science, and the hallmark of peer review is that other researchers can look at data and methodology and determine the work’s validity.
- Some scientists reputedly use a ‘secret sauce’ to make their experiments work and withhold details from publication or describe them only vaguely to retain a competitive edge."
- Absent rigorous peer review, we get the paper published in June in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. Titled “Female hurricanes are deadlier than male hurricanes” The work was debunked once its methods were examined, but not before it got attention nationwide.

Dr. Bloom concludes, There is so much wrong with what poses for science today that one could write an entire book about it. In fact, Campbell and RealClearScience czar Alex Berezow did just that. Science Left Behind: Feel-Good Fallacies and the Rise of the Anti-Scientific Left became the best selling environmental science policy book of 2012. Highly recommended.

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