

Coalition composed of Attorneys General to crack down on dietary supplements industry

By ACSH Staff — March 11, 2015



Last month, the New York State Attorney General (AG) had herbal supplements sold at GNC, Walgreens, Target, and Walmart tested, and found the supplements did not contain the herbs on the label 80 percent of the time, and in many cases contained filler ingredients such as powdered rice, wheat and houseplants. Although some questions have been raised about the reliance on a DNA testing procedure that may not have revealed plant DNA in herbal extracts, the results of this investigation [have led to a coalition of sorts](#) ^[1] comprised of the AGs from Connecticut, Indiana and Puerto Rico, devoted to examine labeling, quality control and other aspects of the herbal supplement industry.

According to the AG of New York, Eric Schneiderman, Clearly the questions we raised about the herbal supplements sold in New York resonate outside of our borders. New Yorkers and consumers nationwide deserve confidence that when an herbal supplement is represented as authentic, pure and natural, that it really is.

ACSH's director of public health, Ariel Savransky had this comment: Well, in fact the problem lies with the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA), which defines dietary supplements as foods not drugs, and therefore exempts these products from the strict approval process necessary for prescription drugs. The FDA does not have the power to regulate this industry, but that should not mean that companies can market fraudulent or dangerous supplements.

The other issue is that people should not be relying on these supplements for miracle cures, when they actually rarely work to ameliorate any medical ailment. And in fact, these unregulated supplements can be harmful. As [ACSH friend Dr. David Seres has said](#) ^[2] in the past, As a nutrition expert, I am horrified by the daily barrage of outrageous and unsubstantiated claims touting cures from everything from E. coli to Ebola. If you do a Web search on just about any disease, you will find carefully worded ads promoting unproven nutritional therapies. Worse, some of these can be harmful. For example, [people have suffered liver damage from green tea extract that is so severe that they have needed a liver transplant](#)

[3]. And the frequency of harm from dietary supplements is on the rise.

Savransky goes on: The issue is greater than having no active ingredient in the product, although that is consumer fraud. The real issue is the promotion of useless products based on no evidence, thanks to the makers being given a free pass by Congress in 1994.

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Links

[1] <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/03/09/safety-of-herbal-supplements-pulls-prosecutors-together/>

[2] <http://acsh.org/2015/02/supplement-opinion-pieces-times-cnn/>

[3] http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/22/us/spike-in-harm-to-liver-is-tied-to-dietary-aids.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0