

Science vs. Politics On Supplements: Who Do You Believe?



By Josh Bloom — November 17, 2015



^[1]A fascinating [debate](#) ^[2] about the multi-billion dollar [dietary](#)

[supplements industry](#) ^[3], a topic about which I have written many times, just appeared on the medical news website [STAT](#) ^[4], which was recently launched by billionaire John Henry, owner of the Boston Globe. The debate featured five dramatically different points of view: American Council on Science and Health adviser Dr. David Seres of Columbia University, Utah Senator Orrin Hatch, Dr. Pieter Cohen of Harvard Medical School, Steve Mister, president and CEO for the Council for Responsible Nutrition (a trade association), and Joshua Sharfstein, MD, from Johns Hopkins, also a former deputy commissioner at the FDA.

I have chosen to focus on Seres and Hatch, because their statements are as diametrically opposed as science and politics can be. Hatch believes that the 1994 Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA), which he helped bring into existence and exempts supplements from FDA standards, has provided an enormous benefit to the American public, while Seres calls it a fraud.

Following are some of the key disagreements between Seres and Hatch. They could hardly be more pronounced. My own comments are also included.

Hatch: "The DSHEA was a remarkable achievement... [it] accomplished a number of things to promote public health.

Seres: "The Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act is one of the worst frauds ever perpetrated on Americans under the guise of protecting their health."

Hatch: "The law created a crystal-clear definition for dietary supplements and made clear they would be regulated as foods."

Bloom: This is complete and utter nonsense. Go into a GNC and locate the following bottles:

- *Yohimbine* (a powerful, and non-specific drug that elicits a wide range of physiological responses in humans, including rapid heart rate, insomnia, and *both* vasodilation and vasoconstriction)
- *MSM* (methylsulfonylmethane, aka dimethylsulfoxide, DMSO an industrial solvent.
- *Dong Quai Root* A mixture of plant-based drugs that is used to (supposedly) r menstrual cramps, premenstrual syndrome (PMS), and menopausal symptoms. It is also used orally as

a [blood](#) [5] purifier; to manage hypertension, [infertility](#) [6], [joint pain](#) [7], ulcers, tired [blood](#) [8] ([anemia](#) [9]), and [constipation](#) [10]; and in the prevention and treatment of allergic attacks. Dong quai is also used orally for the treatment of loss of [skin](#) [11] color (depigmentation) and [psoriasis](#) [12].

- *Melatonin* a hormone that regulates sleep cycles

These are foods? Please.

Hatch: "DSHEA provided the FDA with abundant authority to protect public health through a defined safety standard and new safety authorities."

Seres: "[DSHEA] strips the FDA of all but some anemic oversight of products sold as dietary supplements."

Hatch: "DSHEA also authorized good manufacturing practice guidelines specific to dietary supplements, which were phased in over time..."

Seres: "...some dietary supplements contain hormones and pharmacologically active substances, and even actual drugs have been slipped into the mix."

Hatch: "The solid compromise legislation has had relatively few problems in two decades, and there has not been a major amendment to its structure in the last 20 years."

Seres: "The DSHEA should be repealed, and the FDA given the teeth to properly control the huge dietary supplement industry."

Where I stand is rather obvious with science and health over exploiting the public for money. The entire essence of DSHEA is anti-scientific, it was based on the entirely false premise that just because a chemical happens to occur in a plant, herb, or root that it speaks to the safety or efficacy of what is in the bottle. Worse still, the slippery language of the law allows the supplements industry to sell drugs [and many of these supplements precisely fit the FDA definition of what a drug is](#) [13] while offsetting this obvious flaw with an amateurish disclaimer on the label.

Who do we believe, a politician whose state has become a hotbed for supplement companies or a highly-regarded, ethical physician? You decide.

Want to read more on the subject? A Science 2.0 piece that I co-wrote with Dr. Seres can be found [here](#) [14].

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