

LE Magazine September 2005

## REPORT

## Prescription for Disaster

By Gary Null



In 2005, America will spend nearly \$2 trillion on health care.<sup>1</sup> Virtually all that money will be spent on treating disease. If that treatment were able to enhance the quality and length of people's lives—allowing them to live better by every measure—then we could say it was money well spent. Despite massive expenditures on treatment, however, more Americans are sicker than ever before, with diseases that are mostly preventable: heart disease, cancer, diabetes, arthritis, fibromyalgia, and depression, just to name a few.

My concern is that each year we continue to spend more on treatment, yet we do not see the benefits of that spending, as more and more Americans become sick. Something is terribly wrong. Why are we not spending as much research money on disease prevention as we are on treating disease?

While I certainly respect the motives and integrity of many in the health care industry who seek solutions to the nation's health problems, I cannot respect those with a myopic focus on disease treatment. By excluding factors critical to public health—such as preventive strategies including lifestyle changes, behavior modification, diet, exercise, and stress management—we will continue to see more disease, bigger health care budgets, and greater suffering. Perhaps the most significant issue is that we continue to spend vast amounts of money on drug therapies, as if treating a disease after it has manifested is more important than using resources to prevent the conditions that cause the disease in the first place. This paradigm is illogical and contrary to good health. As important as disease treatment is disease prevention.

It is little understood that powerful drugs used to treat disease have potential side effects that may, in some cases, be life threatening themselves. In connection with modern drug therapies, it is essential that we fully examine the number of people who have been sickened by these treatments and medications. In addition to understanding the effects of adverse drug events, I wanted to understand the iatrogenic effects of medicine—that is, the side effects incurred by medical treatment, usually in the context of medical errors—on the American public.

To accomplish this, I conducted an in-depth, seven-year study to determine why Americans are not becoming healthier and why our medical system is not working properly. I was assisted in this research effort by Martin Feldman, MD, Carolyn Dean, MD, Debora Rasio, and Dorothy Smith, PhD.<sup>2</sup> We examined virtually every area and specialty of American medicine, asking one basic question: have the therapies offered been proven safe and effective?

People make the basic assumption that if their doctors prescribe a tranquilizer, chemotherapeutic agent, or vaccine, or if their child receives a stimulant like Ritalin®, these treatments are safe and effective. It would not be far-fetched to assume FDA and CDC oversight, and to assume that a strenuous drug-approval process is in place. In other words, most people assume that the prescribed drugs work because they have been subjected to a rigorous approval process. In 1997, the government passed the FDA Modernization Act, which required drug companies to report clinical trials; however, the trial results were included in the database only with the sponsor's consent. In other words, the system is voluntary.

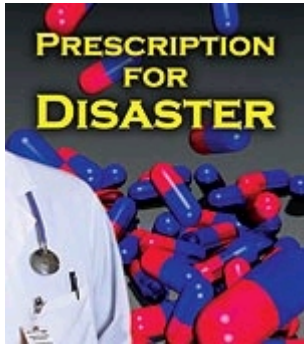


On September 9, 2004, the *Washington Post* reported that a dozen editors of prestigious medical journals jointly announced that they would refuse to publish drug company-sponsored research unless the studies were registered in a public database from the outset—a step designed to push into the public realm previously unpublished studies that have found medications to be ineffective or dangerous.<sup>3</sup> In that *Washington Post* article, Gregory D. Curfman, executive editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, was quoted as saying, "When a pharmaceutical company sponsors a clinical trial and the results turn out not to be in the best financial interests of the company, it has been our experience these results are never made public."<sup>3</sup>

Prescription drugs kill approximately 100,000 Americans each year.<sup>4</sup> If evidence that a drug is potentially unsafe is deliberately

withheld from the public, this is an unacceptable, criminal act. If unsafe or dangerous medications are allowed to be sold, we need to make the FDA and the pharmaceutical industry accountable to us.

I was thus motivated to conduct a documentary on the subject of medications and the pharmaceutical industry. My entire career has been spent investigating health issues and searching for the truth. For example, as a research scientist at the Institute of Applied Biology for over 27 years (while also working in anti-aging medicine and nutrition), I was aware of the powerful influence of a positive lifestyle on health. Long before any of the major journals or newspapers reported it, I saw that the life span of mice could be extended by 30-40% by reducing their caloric intake. I also saw how disease in humans could be minimized by adding living foods, chlorophylls, phytonutrients, fresh vegetables, and juices to diets, and by providing a more stimulating environment and decreasing stress.

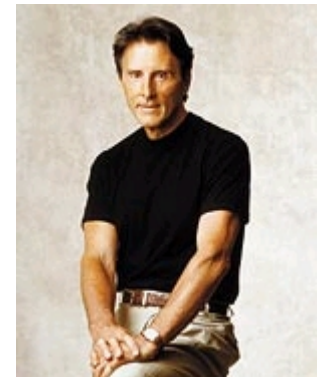


By extrapolating what I discovered in the laboratory to my clinical practice and role as a health advocate, I empowered millions of people to make positive choices in their lives. I know this because I have received the feedback that they have benefited from this information. At the same time, my work was being attacked and condemned by many in the mainstream media and health professions. I believe that many FDA officials were engaging in a systematic campaign of harassment and attack against me, with no sense of fairness or balance. After all, how could you legitimately attack someone for suggesting that fiber should be increased in the American diet, that stress management could help slow premature aging of the body, or that it would be healthy if Americans stopped eating the processed, saturated fat-laden foods that are an integral part of the American diet? We were attacked even for suggesting that Americans take nutritional supplements and that organic foods are healthier than non-organic foods.

Helping to lead the battle for freedom of choice was the Life Extension Foundation, particularly William Faloon and his associate, Saul Kent. After working separately for 30 years, with each of us doing our own work to help inform the public of real choices while simultaneously challenging the wrongs we saw by standing up to the FDA and the medical associations, we decided to join forces to produce a documentary for PBS entitled *Prescription for Disaster*.

My original research on this topic culminated in a position paper entitled "Death by Medicine," which was posted on the Life Extension website.<sup>5</sup> We have also released the results of a 13-year study of more than 12,000 participants in various health support groups who followed the same healthy vegetarian diet, exercised, practiced stress management, and took supplements. The results demonstrate how this program dramatically changed their condition from one of disease to one of varying degrees of wellness.

Healthy choices can help prevent disease and improve existing medical conditions. We will always need physicians, medicine, and medical care. Consumers of health care products and services need to make their decisions based on sound scientific evidence instead of being told what to do by special interest groups, such as the pharmaceutical industry.



Gary Null

When you add up the total number of deaths and injuries directly caused by pharmaceutical drugs, it is staggering. In the last 10 years, medicine has injured 191 million Americans and killed close to 8 million.<sup>5</sup> This is more than all of the American casualties in all of our world wars combined. Yet these dead have no monuments. There are no parades for them. Those who are responsible for this carnage have never been held accountable or faced a trial.

Our documentary *Prescription for Disaster* is just one small step in alerting people to what is at stake the next time they watch a drug advertisement on television and assume that the advertised drug is what they should be taking. An old Chinese proverb says that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. By watching our new documentary, you will be taking that first step.

A copy of Gary Null's new documentary, *Prescription for Disaster*, which retails for \$18, is available to Life Extension members for only \$12.

**Order *Prescription for Disaster* Online**

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## References

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5. Available at: [http://www.lef.org/magazine/mag2004/mar2004\\_aws\\_i\\_death\\_01.htm](http://www.lef.org/magazine/mag2004/mar2004_aws_i_death_01.htm). Accessed June 14, 2005.

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