FDA Deputy Chief Sharfstein Leaves Agency

BY ELIZABETH MECHCATIE

Dr. Joshua Sharfstein, the Food and Drug Administration's principal deputy commissioner, has left the agency to become Maryland's health secretary.

Dr. Sharfstein was appointed to the FDA position in May 2009 by President Obama after having served as the acting commissioner for food and drugs for several months. Previously, he had served as the Baltimore city health commissioner, during which time he questioned the safety of over-the-counter cough and cold products in young children. His efforts received national attention and resulted in FDA hearings on the topic and, ultimately, product restrictions.

During his nearly 2 years at the FDA, Dr. Sharfstein gained a reputation as a tough, intelligent regulator who, alongside Commissioner Margaret Hamburg, sought to restore the FDA's role as an agency whose foremost mission is to protect and promote public health. Their initiatives included expediting responses to product safety issues and manufacturer violations.

Also during his tenure, the agency reexamined its controversial decision to clear a knee repair device, leading to a current re-evaluation of the how the FDA reviews medical devices.

John Taylor, counselor to the commissioner, has been asked to serve as the acting principal deputy commissioner for the next 60 days, the FDA said in a written statement. ■

Jessica Bylander of "The Gray Sheet," also published by Elsevier, contributed to this report.