FDA Targets Sham Diabetes Product Web Sites

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The sale of products that are misrepresented as cures or treatments for diabetes and the Internet sites that advertise these products are the targets of a campaign launched by U.S., Mexican, and Canadian government agencies.

In a statement issued Oct. 19, the Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) announced that the FDA had issued 24 warning letters to companies marketing dietary supplements with claims that the products treated, cured, prevented, or mitigated diabetes. To date, about 180 letters and other advisories have been sent to online outlets in the three countries as a result of the campaign, the statement says.

On Oct. 19, the FTC also announced a new campaign aimed at educating consumers about how to avoid falling for sham diabetes cures. Included is an example of a Web site promoting a phony product called Glucobate.

"The Internet can be a great source of information, but it also is a billboard for ads that promise miracle cures for diabetes and other serious diseases," Lynda Parnes, director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection, said in the statement.

"We will not tolerate practices that raise false hopes and bilk consumers of precious health care dollars," Margaret O'K. Glavin, the FDA's associate commissioner for regulatory affairs, said in the statement.

"Those of us who care for people with diabetes should be grateful that the FDA and regulators in Canada and Mexico are warning our patients about Web sites offering false hope," Dr. Philip Levy, chairman of the section of endocrinology and metabolism at Good Samaritan Hospital, Phoenix, said in an interview.

While the Internet can be helpful at times, these particular Web sites are fraudulent and are promoting "cures" for diabetes, with absolutely no evidence to support claims, and could be harmful to patients, he added. Clinicians should encourage patients to report any suspicious Web site to the FDA, and discourage them from trying any of these "cures," noted Dr. Levy, a past president of the American College of Endocrinology.

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An example of one warning letter, sent by the FDA to a Reno, Nev.–based company about its product called "Enhansulin," notes that the product is advertised as containing extract from "Caucasian blueberry leaves." The letter says that marketing this product with the therapeutic claims that appear on its Web site establishes it as a drug and, therefore, violates the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. Some of the claims on the Web site, according to the letter, include statements that the product lowers blood sugar and cholesterol levels naturally and that Caucasian blueberry leaves have been "effectively used to manage the effects of diabetes" for centuries.

The list of the 24 companies that have been sent warning letters, with links to the letters, is provided on the FDA's Web site at www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/dialist.html. The phony ad created by the FTC as part of its consumer education campaign is available at: http://wemarket4u.net/glucobate/index.html. ■

Diabetes Guide for School Personnel

The Diabetes Research Institute Foundation has produced a guide for anyone entrusted with caring for a child with type 1 diabetes. "Facts About Diabetes: A Guide for School Personnel and Child Care Providers" has instructions on how to handle emergencies as well as information about the disease and how it is controlled. The guide includes a diabetes management form that can be personalized for each child and easily accessed for speedy solutions. To order copies of the brochure, call 800-321-3437. ■