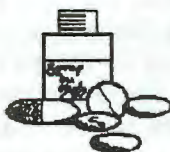


Pills-a-go-go

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Fake Valium, Zantac

Everybody knows the heartbreak of Valium from Thailand ... looks like the real thing from the old days when Roche still had the patent on it, but when you swallow those babies they turn out to be half strength or worse, no-strength. These days the pill counterfeiters have gotten very heavy into fake Zantacs, which contain no active ingredient but chalk. The brouhaha started when a bunch of Brits found out their version of the world's number one H2 antagonist didn't work anymore. The supply was traced to a cut-rate pharmaceuticals company in Athens, which mysteriously disappeared by the time investigators arrived on the scene.

Although a lot of these fakes are made in Thailand (where pill counterfeiting is not illegal) plenty of others are being manufactured in West African countries which are also doing a land office business in mediocre cough syrup — some of it sweetened with radiator fluid!

To avoid this waste of money, buy off-brands of diazepam instead of the real thing unless the pills are in the new form with the V-shaped hole in the middle. As for Zantac — switch to Tagamet or buy it sealed in foil pouches from the factory.

Scientology and Prozac

Posing as a group of concerned citizens the Church of Scientology is waging an effective smear campaign against Lilly's mega-drug Prozac. Calling themselves the Citizen's commission on Human Rights, these jerks have managed to get on daytime talk shows to link Prozac with horrible side-effects such as suicidal ideation and a strange compulsion to go on homicidal rampages. Their "proof" is thin at best. Based entirely on an unfortunate February 1990 article in the American Journal of Psychiatry by (among others) Dr. Martin Teicher, the so-called study presented exactly **continued on back**

ME TOO! ME TOO!

By Steven A. Dore, SPP

One thing that riles the DEA is something the FDA has no problem with at all — designer drugs.

For years, clandestine chemists have outwitted cops by merely adding innocuous molecular groups to illegal substances to produce different — and legal — chemicals that induce the same effect. Thus, variations on speed have become endless, and lawmakers are always a step behind in the game. To make this more difficult, some legislatures are considering making entire classes of drugs illegal or basing their illegality on the effect they produce. Have fun, guys, when somebody figures out how to attach amphetamines to aspirin.

But, in the prescription drug industry this exact game is being played to get around patents companies have on their top-sellers. The motive is profit but the result can be an improvement. Known as "Me Too" drugs, they capitalize on sure-fire winners through the chemical equivalent of creative accounting.

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Prozac continued

six cases of people who developed suicidal preoccupations after taking Prozac. Not only is this a ridiculously small number of patients to form any opinion, all the patients were extremely atypical. Three had already attempted suicide. Only two of the patients were taking fluoxetine alone. All had been treated with a host of psychoactive drugs including carbamazepine and amphetamines. One of these patients had been so desperate to relieve her 17-year depression that she had already participated in five investigational drug programs after going through most tricyclic compounds and seven other drugs including Lithium.

This study was enormously flawed as is the anecdotal "evidence" the scientologists drag out on their talk shows. But, they have good strong voices and have managed to convince the Phil Donahues of the world that Prozac's a killer.

Lilly, stupidly, refuses to defend its drug. As is the case with all Lilly media relations, its responses are limited to various ways of saying "no comment".

Over the Counter

Expected at any time (at one point it was supposed to be February) at least two categories of drugs will be approved for over the counter use. H2 antagonists like Tagamet et al and NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) like Ciba-Geigy's Voltaren are already being prepared by their companies for even masser consumption. You'll know it when it happens for the NSAIDs — there ought to be a slew of new headache-inducing headache pill commercials. Pills-a-go-go still recommends aspirin for plain old pain. For more fun, naturally, you've got to get behind the counter.

Pill Psychology

Sure, this makes sense — pill companies don't just pick colors and shapes willy-nilly. Some (like Valium) are deliberately shaped strangely to distinguish them from generics and others follow company-established patterns like Merck Sharp Dohme's pentagon pills. Lilly, for some reason prefers to call its capsules "puvules" and they stick a little trademark sign beside the name. They look like capsules to us but perhaps with softer, more rounded ends. Capsules are good anyway since there is a well-known placebo effect associated with the format. People think capsules are stronger than tablets. Hence, McNeil's reluctance to give up the capsule format of Extra-Strength

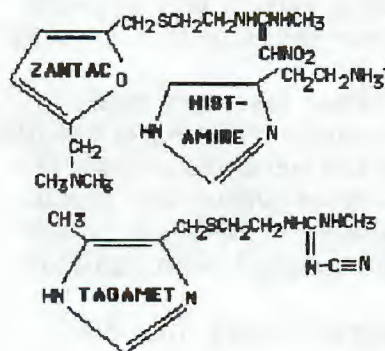
Tylonol even after two killing sprees occurred with spiked pills. Burroughs Wellcome, too, is loathe to give up the capsule format of its 12-hour Sudafed for the same reason. Laws suggested for the repeal of all medications in capsule form are ridiculous — there are other ways to tamper with drugs than crudely opening the capsule (all of the Sudafed tampering cases were blatantly obvious). Besides, without capsules and their placebo effect, how would the headache people be able to get their medications to beat aspirin 2 to 1?

Color, too, plays a big role. These days many antibiotics are showing up in bright reds and oranges to suggest their fiery kill-them-bugs-dead powers. Antidepressants tend toward creamy shades or soothing colors like peach and baby blue. Power colors like bright purple are becoming popular with pills that are meant to overcome painful conditions like stomach reflux. Anybody care to do some study on this one?

ME TOO CONTINUED

When the lab guys at Smith Kline Beecham came up with Tagamet

they knew they had a winner — a cure for ulcers. That's when Glaxo developed their version of the drug, Zantac, another H2 antagonist with the same effect. But Zantac has fewer side effects and requires lower doses. Now 150 mgs of medi-



cine does what 400 did.

Then Merck Sharp Dohme mixed up their version and came up with a drug with virtually no side effects and requiring just 20mgs to do the same job. Of course Lilly merely attached a barnacle molecular group to what was essentially Zantac and marketed it as Axid. It's no better, but no worse.

ACE inhibitors for heart patients began with Squibb's Capoten and spawned clones by MSD (Vasotec and Prinivil) and Stuart (Zestril). Vasotec is now the second largest selling drug in the world (next to Zantac). The profitability is obvious — the two largest selling drugs in the world are "me too" drugs.

Drug companies haven't squawked about this, not only because they love to rip off each other's pills, but because, despite the rip-offs there is still enormous profitability in being the first on the market. Prozac, for instance, is likely to continue kicking ass even after it is cloned by competitors.