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COMPENDIA UNIFICATION BECOMES A REALITY

The exploits of Henry Kissinger have become almost legend as he has traveled about the world during the past several years negotiating one agreement after another on matters that were considered hopelessly beyond reconciliation. Although he actually had no hand in it, the recently announced unification agreement relating to the official compendia represents an accomplishment worthy of Dr. Kissinger's negotiating talent.

For many years, there have been repeated suggestions from various quarters, including government, industry, and the health professions, that unification of the NF and USP would be desirable. Following a period of preliminary discussions, this possibility became the subject of intense serious discussion in 1970 when each of the two organizations responsible for publication of the official compendia separately took actions directing their respective officers and staffs to determine if and how merger of the two compendia could be satisfactorily achieved.

An immense amount of time and effort was devoted to such explorations during the ensuing four years. Unfortunately, however, despite total dedication of the negotiating parties to the goal of unification, basic problems or objections continually surfaced which apparently made the original goal of a pure merger impossible to achieve. Meanwhile, the patience of interested onlookers—including pharmacists, physicians, Food and Drug Administration personnel, industry scientists, and the many participants in the respective compendium programs—began to diminish as a result of their desire to see some meaningful progress made toward compendia consolidation. Therefore, increasing pressures mounted that some solution be found and action be taken.

Having been frustrated in all their efforts to this point, the negotiating parties decided to explore somewhat different approaches to achieve the desired end result. Out of this exploration, an agreement was concluded early in July whereby the USP and the NF would be unified through the sale of all rights and responsibilities relating to the NF to the publisher of the USP, the United States Pharmacopeial Convention, Inc.

This dramatic development required substantial concessions on the part of both organizations. Undoubtedly, such concessions were felt to be not only justified but, in fact, necessary by the respective organizations in order to accomplish the desired goal, which in everyone's view was paramount.

A major consideration which swayed the APhA in reaching its decision on this matter was its conclusion that survival of the drug standard setting function within the private sector—and divorced from direct control from either industry or government—is even more important than having APhA continue direct authority over one phase within such a program (*i.e.*, the National Formulary).

Now that this dream is to become reality, it is our opinion that unification of the official compendia will be of enormous benefit in strengthening the so-called independent "third force"—as distinguished from government and industry—in our three-sided system of responsibility for drug quality.

Over the years, the compendia have contributed very substantially to assuring a quality drug supply. However, due to the advent of many potent new drugs—as well as new techniques of analysis and new knowledge relative to drug properties requiring standardization—the compendia need to muster all possible resources and strength in order to meet present day challenges.

When the agreement to acquire the NF was announced, USP Executive Director William M. Heller cautioned that unification of the compendia is not an end in itself, but that this should serve as an efficient conduit whereby the emerging new challenges involving the nation's drug supply can be successfully met in a way that will result in the most objective scientific decisions possible in order to ensure the safest and most effective drug supply. We echo Dr. Heller's comments, and we add our full support toward this end. —EGF