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PR IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENCES

"Better Living Through Chemistry!"

For those readers who are in the same age bracket as this writer, there is no need to identify the slogan quoted above, or to tell when it was in wide, popular use. For our younger readers, however, we should explain that this was a theme that ran through the extensive advertising of the DuPont Chemical Company during and immediately following World War II.

Having developed artificial fibers, and nylon in particular, from a virtual nothing into a huge segment of American industrial production during the decade of the 1940's, the DuPont firm could truly boast of the wonderful changes that chemistry, nylon, and DuPont had worked for the citizens of this country in the span of a few short years.

But chemistry was responsible for more than just women's sheer stockings and Air Force pilots' parachutes. It also was the vehicle that brought us vitamins, miracle drugs, artificial rubber tires, sudsy detergents, and countless other consumer products that literally transformed the average person's daily life-style more dramatically than mankind had previously experienced in time periods covering hundreds or even thousands of years.

Consequently, to have grown up as a teenager during those fabulous late forties was to feel and share the excitement of breathtaking new discoveries and to marvel at the almost daily new products and conveniences.

And, at that time, to be able to tell friends, colleagues, and relatives that you were embarking on the study of science and chemistry was to feel the pride and to sense the adulation experienced more recently by moon-walking astronauts or Super Bowl quarterbacks.

But as time went on, the public began to hear about insecticide buildup in birds and fish, about waterways being fouled with nonbiodegradable detergents, about the cancer risk of certain food additives, about growth hormone residues in food animals, about the risk of nuclear power plant accidents, and about dozens of other problems associated with those wonderful products of the chemical age—and all of a sudden it wasn't too popular to be identified as a chemist or scientist.

Pharmacy and pharmacists shared to a great extent in these swings of public favor. After all, pharmacy and pharmacists most directly deal with the drugs, the vitamins, the hormones, the pharmaceutical excipients, the flavors, the artificial sweeteners, and so on that first appeared so attractive but later were looked upon with misgivings and fear. And aside from chemists *per se*, among the professions, pharmacists probably take more chemistry courses in their formal education than any other professionals with the possible exception of chemical engineers.

And naturally, within the community of pharmacy, pharmaceutical scientists probably felt the brunt of this fall from public popularity more severely than any other group. But, on the other hand, no group is more aware than pharmaceutical scientists of the many good things that science, chemistry, and more specifically the pharmaceutical sciences have done to contribute to better health and longer lives.

Consequently, it may be timely for some down-to-earth, grass-roots public relations in which we take the opportunity to talk at meetings of consumer groups, fraternal organizations, ladies' clubs, boy scouts, community associations, better business bureaus, or whatever and to provide a balanced picture of the benefits and risks of drugs as well as the special stories about timed-release preparations, about novel drug delivery systems, and about the development of prodrugs.

The key to success in such public relations efforts is that such presentations must be credible. The hazards of potent drugs, the unknown problems associated with all new products, and the difficulty of achieving zero defects in product quality must also be recognized in an honest and forthright manner.

Certainly, the "pill for every ill" approach is harmful and dangerous to society; as such, we must do what we can to reject such thinking. However, for the public to espouse an attitude of therapeutic nihilism would be at least equally unfortunate for society.

Pharmaceutical scientists have the information, background, and opportunity to influence public opinion to see that neither of these extremes is allowed to prevail. And, in speaking out with such a message, pharmaceutical scientists will enhance their own image in the area of public esteem.

—EGF