

FDA'S EXPANDED CONSUMER EDUCATION PROGRAM

by

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I am pleased to have this opportunity to give you a brief report on the activities and plans of FDA's new Division of Consumer Education.

A reorganization of FDA last November recognized the growing importance of our educational functions and elevated them to Bureau status, co-equal with the corresponding organizational structure for law enforcement and regulatory activities. Our new Bureau is called the Bureau of Education and Voluntary Compliance. Our companion Division in the Bureau is called the Division of Industry Advice. That Division is dedicated to the proposition that a violation prevented is much to be preferred over a violation punished after a consumer has been injured or defrauded. The Division of Industry Advice will use modern information and communications techniques to promote the maximum degree of voluntary compliance with the law.

Our Division of Consumer Education is, in turn, established on the premise that the well informed consumer needs the least Government protection, and is best able to assume his citizenship responsibilities in those public affairs requiring his participation. Citizenship responsibility today includes an obligation to be well informed, because misinformation can lead to actions hurtful not only to the individual but also to the community at large. We frequently see this demonstrated in the field of medical quackery, where sincere but misinformed and misguided zealots help perpetuate the worthless remedy or device and bring pressures that hamper law enforcement agencies to the great disservice of the very people they are trying to benefit.

The charter of our new Division directs us to plan, organize, and carry out a program of consumer education to help achieve effectiveness of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act and related laws. This program will assist consumers to do many things such as

- . to use drugs safely and effectively
- . to prevent accidental poisonings in the home
- . to evaluate label and advertising claims
- . to choose health products and services wisely
- . to avoid quackery and other frauds and cheats
- . to participate in standards-making and other Governmental processes, and
- . to obtain all of the intended benefits from the laws we enforce.

We are further directed to utilize all appropriate information materials, techniques, and channels of communication to reach consumers, including those in such various population groups as students, older Americans, the socially or economically under-privileged, foreign-language groups, and the physically handicapped, as well as consumer and professional organizations and their leaders.

We are still further directed to plan and carry out a program to assure a flow of information from consumers, through the Consumer Consultants, consumer surveys, and other appropriate research; to learn consumer needs and to discover gaps in consumer protection and how to remove those gaps; and to learn consumer attitudes about FDA policies and programs.

The Division consists of three Branches. The largest of these in terms of staff is the Consumer Information Branch, which preserves intact the former Consumer Education Branch of the former Division of Public Information. This Branch, headed by Mary E. Cunningham, will be responsible for preparation of all of the various kinds of information materials needed to accomplish the mission of the program. These will include pamphlets, Consumer Memos, exhibits, films, filmstrips and slides, records and tapes, radio and television scripts or spot announcements, and materials tailored to the special needs of professional people and the various population groups to whom the programs are directed. Appropriate channels for the distribution of such materials to reach the intended audiences will be established. We will maintain liaison with appropriate Federal, State, local, and private agencies and institutions that can be of help in carrying out the program. The Consumer Information Branch also handles the consumer correspondence of the Food and Drug Administration and sees to it that correspondence is made an effective instrument of consumer education.

The individual programs of the Consumer Information Branch might be designated as Consumer Inquiries, School Information, Senior Citizens Program, and Other Adult Education.

The second Branch of the Division and the oldest of our various programs is the Consumer Consultant Branch, headed by Mrs. Carla Williams, who is well known to you and who will follow me on this program to tell you about the expanded activities of this Branch.

Mrs. Williams and her staff will carry out a program to provide channels of communication through which consumer needs, views, and attitudes as related to FDA programs and policies reach the Food and Drug Administration. They will plan ways in which the FDA field organization can serve as channels of FDA communication with consumers. They will furnish FDA field Districts with program guidance as to materials, exhibits, consumer programs, industry contacts, liaison with other Government agencies, and consumer survey projects in which the Consumer Consultants will have special interest or responsibility.

The third Branch of our new Division is the Consumer Surveys Branch. This is a brand new unit not yet fully staffed but with wide possibilities for influencing FDA programs of the future. As its name indicates, this Branch will conduct special surveys, studies, and evaluations of consumer attitudes, interests, understandings and prejudices, and of purchasing and use habits, trends, and other factors related to our consumer protection responsibilities.

Through the survey and opinion research technique, we hope to learn where consumer misconceptions lie so that we may direct our educational efforts to their correction. We hope to learn more about consumer habits of purchase, label-reading, and product use and storage so that we can increase the protective value of product labeling.

We hope to assemble consumer views about expected food composition, understanding of label statements, food additives, color additives, pesticides, new drugs, and the like, to assist in the administrative decision-making process.

The Consumer Surveys Branch will be a small but select group with knowledge of sound opinion research techniques. It is expected that for the most part the actual surveys will be contracted out to organizations skilled in the type of work once the problem is sufficiently defined.

So much for our organization and future plans. What have we done so far? Here are a few of the more interesting recent highlights:

1. To respond to the interests of teachers and students in FDA problems and activities, we have packaged our existing materials so that they will fit into high school curricula. We have prepared a chart to assist the professional teacher in the use of these materials. About 20,000 kits of these materials are currently being mailed out in response to requests from teachers.

2. We have recently ventured into the field of radio and television spot announcements. The initial response from stations receiving these has been most encouraging.

3. During National Poison Prevention Week, we distributed about 150,000 copies of our comic booklet "Dennis the Menace Takes a Poke at Poison." This booklet contains an important message for children and their parents. These were mailed to pediatricians and dentists for office use, through the cooperation of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Dental Association. We are hopeful that each of the booklets will be seen and read by many people, thus amplifying our total audience. The compliments we have received on the comic book format and letters requesting additional copies have been most gratifying.

4. Also for National Poison Prevention Week, we furnished program material which was used by a national television program estimated to go into six million homes.

5. We are preparing a series of "FDA Features," designed especially for the woman's page to explain food standards, food additives, color additives, and other matters that are of interest and concern to the homemaker. These have also received good reception.

6. For National Senior Citizens Month, we are exploring the possibility of putting a number of our publications that have material of special interest to the older American into talking books and Braille editions with the cooperation of the Division of the Blind, Library of Congress. We are also considering larger type "easy vision" editions of some of these publications and have the cooperation of the American Optometric Association in this venture.

7. During fiscal year 1964 to date we have printed over half a million copies of consumer publications and have answered an estimated 25,000 letters from consumers.

These are illustrative only, and we have many other interesting projects, including 35-mm. slide sets, filmstrips, and movies under way. A basic guide-line for our new Division is that our information must be helpful to consumers. We invite suggestions from the Council on Consumer Information as to projects which might be appropriate for us to undertake, and we hope that we and the Council can work together to promote the consumer's best interests through information.