

## Darvon: Effectiveness and Safety

C. W. Pettinga of Eli Lilly and Company contends (Letters, 6 Apr., p. 6) that parts of R. Jeffrey Smith's article, "Federal government faces painful decision on Darvon" (News and Comment, 2 March, p. 857), "are misleading and not objective." It is Pettinga's letter that is misleading and not objective.

Pettinga says Smith creates the impression that Lilly has acted irresponsibly in promoting and discussing Darvon (propoxyphene hydrochloride) through the use of certain words and quotations, such as that "by not calling Darvon a narcotic, Lilly was not informing physicians about its narcotic properties." Writes Pettinga: "These insinuations ignore the fact that pharmaceutical manufacturers must conform to Food and Drug Administration-approved labeling that requires full disclosure of a drug's therapeutic usefulness, limitations, and adverse reactions or side effects."

Pettinga later notes that the National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council's 1969 review of propoxyphene confirmed the efficacy of 65-milligram doses of Darvon, but he ignores what the reviewers wrote under general comments, item VIII, about Lilly's labeling (1):

Although the package insert is in general acceptable, with the reservations noted above, one disturbing feature comes to mind when the insert is considered as a whole. An obvious effort has been made to avoid pointing out that dextropropoxyphene is structurally closely related to the narcotic analgesics methadone and isomethadone, that its general pharmacologic properties are those of the narcotics as a group, that poisoning produced by dextropropoxyphene is essentially typical of narcotic overdose (complicated by convulsions) and should be treated as such, and that the distinction in dependence-producing properties and abuse liability between dextropropoxyphene and various other narcotics is essentially quantitative, rather than qualitative.

That this effort, unfortunately, appears to have been successful, is attested to by the fact that the majority of house staff and attending physicians who make liberal use of Darvon assume that its pharmacology is basically similar to that of aspirin or phenacetin, rather than to that of the narcotics.

Pettinga also asserts that "Effectiveness and safety are the two major reasons why billions of doses of Darvon have been prescribed for millions of patients. No amount of salesmanship and promotion could generate the continued sale and use of a drug that did not perform as expected by both the prescribing physician and the patient." The first as-

sertion is an unsupported claim. The second suggests that the first must be true on grounds that it is inconceivable that it might be false.

As evidence to the contrary, consider comments by Louis Lasagna in 1976 and 1964, respectively:

1) Offering a list of reasons that might explain propoxyphene's "remarkable success record," Lasagna concludes (2, p. 20), "... the drug has been effectively advertised—Darvon is a household word, part of the vocabulary of many people."

2) "One is at first puzzled at the enormous popularity of oral *d*-[dextro] propoxyphene in the United States, in view of its less than brilliant performance in controlled trials. This is less of a paradox than it seems, however. Like some compounds of even more dubious analgesic merit (ethoheptazine, carisoprodol), *d*-propoxyphene is sold not only alone but in combination with aspirin. Most *d*-propoxyphene is sold in combination with an 'ASA' preparation. Since aspirin is an excellent analgesic, and preparations containing *d*-propoxyphene can be obtained in the United States without a narcotic prescription, there are two obvious reasons for its popularity" (3, p. 75).

Finally, the hearings on propoxyphene chaired by Senator Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.) were held by the Senate Select Committee on Small Business, not by a subcommittee.

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### References

1. National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council: *Report of Panel on Drugs for the Relief of Pain on Darvon Compound* (NDA 10-966, National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council, Washington, D.C., 1969).
2. L. Lasagna, *Ann. Intern. Med.* **85**, 619 (1976).
3. ———, *Pharmacol. Rev.* **16**, 47 (1964).

## Burt's Missing Ladies

May I, as the journalist who wrote the first story in which the word "fraud" was used in connection with the work of Sir Cyril Burt, congratulate D. D. Dorfman on his article about Sir Cyril Burt (29 Sept. 1978, p. 1177). I would like to offer some additional evidence that has emerged through inquiries made by the *Sunday Times* and others over the last two years. Some of this information has been published in newspapers (1-6),

magazines (7-9), and in the *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society* (10, 11), where it is not readily available to American scholars.

The existence of Burt's research collaborators "Miss Margaret Howard" and "Miss J. Conway" has not been satisfactorily settled. Dorfman says, "it appears . . . that Howard did exist." However, if she did, she does not seem to have existed in the time and place referred to by Burt, nor did she write the papers that bear her name. And the lack of any evidence for the existence of Conway is even more important because it was she who was supposed to have gathered much of Burt's data.

I originally tried to trace Howard and Conway in order to check with them some of Leon Kamin's findings (12). The British Psychological Society (BPS) told me they had no record of either of these ladies, and two officials (13) volunteered their opinion to me that Howard and Conway were "pen-names" used by Burt. These officials told me that from time to time they had been approached for help in finding the ladies by researchers who sought permission to quote their papers (the custom in those days). The BPS officials said they had always referred the researchers back to Burt, who invariably said he was out of touch with Howard and Conway and gave permission for quotations on their behalf.

The BPS suggested I get in touch with Jack Tizard of the Institute of Education, London, who was also looking for the ladies and had approached several of Burt's old colleagues without success. I made additional checks at University College, London, and at the former London Day Training College, where Burt had held chairs, and also at London University (Senate House), where I found no records of Howard or Conway. Nor is there any record of their having been teachers in London state schools, although it is possible that they were associated with private schools. Furthermore, 18 of Burt's closest associates during each period of his life from the 1920's on knew nothing of the ladies (1), including those closest to him during his retirement, when the Howard and Conway papers were published. Advertisements in the [London] *Times* elicited no response, although such advertisements subsequently proved successful in tracing a deceased colleague of Burt's called Dorothy Wheeler (14).

Following the publication of these findings in the *Sunday Times* (1), John Cohen of the University of Manchester, a former student of Burt's, said that he