Updates on Herbal Supplement Crackdown

This article first appeared in the HCV Advocate, provides updated information about the recent herbal supplement crackdown, and gives pertinent information for those with hepatitis C and liver disease.

May 11, 2015 By Alan Franciscus

In an earlier article, I wrote about the New York State Attorney General's Office crackdown on four major chains (GNC, Target, Walmart, and Walgreens). The stores were selling herbal supplements that contained very little of the stated ingredients listed on the labels and that included contaminants. The testing occurred in the brand named stores throughout New York State.

Good news—GNC Holding announced that it had restocked some of the herbal supplements to their stores in New York after they reached an agreement with the New York Attorney General and complied and corrected the problems. Furthermore, GNC agreed that they would adopt testing standards in the 6,000 stores nationwide that would exceed requirements that the Food and Drug Administration requires—this is a first for a major herbal supplement chain in the United States.

Additionally, GNC committed to the following best practices:

- Authentication: Within 18 months GNC will implement DNA barcoding to confirm the plant's authenticity.
- Broad Testing for Contaminants: GNC will test for the eight most common allergens before and after production.
- Consumer transparency: GNC will prominently display signs in their stores and on their website with relevant information about the herbs and supplements including extracts, chemicals, and solvents used and explain the different processes. GNC will list all ingredients on its product labels, per existing FDA rules.
- Reporting: GNC will provide semiannual reports to the Attorney General's Office, detailing the

above information.

In related news, 13 state attorneys have asked the U.S. Congress to investigate the herbal supplement industry based on the NY General's Office investigation. The state attorneys are considering giving the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) more oversight over herbal supplements. However, it has been previously reported that the FDA is considerably underfunded already. The question of undertaking a massive job of regulating herbal supplements would need a large funding package attached to any herbal regulation bill.

Comment: Regarding GNC—this is excellent progress. However, where are the agreements with Target, Walmart, and Walgreens? Hopefully, the other stores will soon agree to the same terms as GNC. If you want to know the potential harm of these herbs, check out the original article—it will make you think twice before buying any herbs or supplements unless there is some type of comprehensive oversight.

Source: State of New York's Attorney General's Office

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