Homeopathy

I would like to bring to your attention the ongoing debate regarding homeopathy. I decided to write to the *CPJ* because you are the voice of Canadian pharmacy.

I feel that the Canadian Pharmacists Association should state an opinion on the subject of homeopathy, because these products are sold in pharmacies across Canada. Despite most scientific and critical denouncement of homeopathy, there seems a reluctance (for monetary reasons?) for pharmacy organizations to bring up this matter in their magazines and journals.

I know homeopathy is a multimillion dollar business, which pits the desire for sales of its products against the scientific background pharmacists have and the trust customers have in us. But if we knowingly sell a product in which the seller admits there is nothing of the original product in the granule, and there are no clinical trials to show the effectiveness of the product, we are selling what Dr. Joe Schwarcz, professor of chemistry at McGill who has written extensively about homeopathy, calls “placebos.”¹

Recently, I’ve seen announcements for seminars on natural products and doubt that this issue will be debated, meaning that homeopathic products will be discussed and proposed as viable treatments without touching on the controversy about them.

Selling homeopathic products in pharmacies, with the Federal Government having given them homeopathic numbers, enables them to be sold as recognized natural products. This gives these products the cachet of being effective medications while they are only placebos.

You may be aware of the \$30 million class action lawsuit against the manufacturer Boiron and Shoppers Drug Mart for “selling worthless homeopathic products.” Because of this lawsuit, it is important for Canadian pharmacy organizations to make a decision about homeopathic products. Do they have any pharmaceutical activity or are they a scam? Have they any clinical trials to back up the claims they make for the hundreds of items available? (Pharmacist Scott Gavura, in his blog “Science-based Pharmacy,” is quite scathing on the subject of homeopathy.²) This is important because if Boiron loses (or even if they cut a deal), the profession still must have an opinion on this issue.

Will all pharmacies carrying homeopathic products be sued next?

Pharmacists should not be obliged to sell products they believe are worthless.

— Jack Hoffman, pharmacist
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References

1. Schwarcz J. Homeopathy relies on extreme dilution. *The Montreal Gazette*. 2012 July 2. www.montrealgazette.com/health/Schwarcz+Homeopathy+relies+extreme+dilution/6531270/story.html (accessed August 12, 2012).
2. Gavura S. The consequences of legitimizing nonsense. Science-Based Pharmacy. Available: <http://sciencebasedpharmacy.wordpress.com/2012/08/22/the-consequences-of-legitimizing-nonsense/> (accessed August 22, 2012).