

Fact or Factoid? The Niacin-Danger Case

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Much of what doctors understand about new drugs is from information provided by the drug companies that produce the new drugs. It's good business-practice for drug companies to promote their drugs. Often, as a drug company points out the advantages of its drugs, the company also alludes to the disadvantages and possible dangers of competing drugs.

Sometimes, the "facts" that a drug company dispenses about competing drugs are more effective than factual. If the fact-like information effectively casts doubt on a competing drug's safety, purchasers, understandably, look for a safer drug.

Excerpts from...

FACTS AND FACTOIDS: An Information Sheet for Patients

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Fact: Something that has really occurred or is the case: hence a datum of experience, as distinct from conclusions. Loosely defined, something that is alleged to be, or might be a "fact."

Factoid: A factoid is a fact that never existed before it appeared in print, but has been reprinted ever since. It is truly launched if it first appears in a reputable medical journal like the Journal of the American Medical Association and republished in the New York Times which gives it international stature. A factoid, using simple Anglo Saxon terminology, is a lie, and like many lies and misconceptions, once it has been published develops a life of its own and is reprinted over and over, from textbook to textbook. The best example is the lie (factoid) that vitamin C causes kidney stones.

Evidence Required to Establish Facts in Clinical Medicine

Clinical facts are based on clinical observations made by a clinician who can draw careful and honest conclusions from clinical data. These are one-to-one observations, patient and doctor. These kind of observations have fallen into disfavor with the medical establishment and are labeled anecdotal. These clinical trials are basic to the whole field of medicine because no therapeutic trials will ever be undertaken until one or more physicians find that the treatment has some value, even if only for a few patients.

About Mega-dose Niacin

The factoid niacin causes liver damage is analyzed thoroughly by William Parsons Jr, who shows that niacin will often increase liver function tests, but that these increases do not arise from liver pathology. Since I began

using mega-doses of this vitamin in 1952, I have seen a few cases of obstructive-type jaundice, which cleared when niacin was stopped, and in one case I had to resume the use of niacin because the patient's schizophrenia recurred. He recovered and the jaundice did not recur. I have seen so few cases of jaundice that there is little evidence that the jaundice arose from the use of the niacin. Jaundice has a natural occurrence rate, and from any series of patients a few will get jaundice from other factors. In rare cases, too much niacin causes nausea and vomiting, and if this persists because the niacin is not decreased or stopped the dehydration might be a factor. I have seen no cases in the past fifteen years. The main danger from taking niacin is not jaundice, it is that people will live longer.