

Codex, cabals and conspiracies

Prof Stephen P Myers explores the natural-health underground.

Shhhh . . . read this article quietly, as they might be listening. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA, a.k.a. the Feds) is purported to be in collusion with big pharmaceutical companies (a.k.a. Big Pharma) to realise a secret agenda. This agenda is so secret that the *JCM* is taking a great risk in this exposé of the TGA and Big Pharma bringing the dreaded *Codex Alimentarius* into Australia, which will deprive us all of complementary medicine (CM).

At least that's what I have gleaned from a paper circulating in the natural-health underground. Another player implicated in this conspiracy is the Complementary Healthcare Council (CHC). A cabal of three villains and a secret Codex — no, this is not the next Dan Brown novel or another adventure starring Harrison Ford, but is alleged to be happening here and now, and many consumers are in fear of the consequences.

Holey truths

Firstly, let me burst the bubble of suspense. I do not believe this conspiracy is true and for us in 'the lucky country', there is nothing to fear. The paper is the ramblings of what I am told is a genuinely concerned, however totally misinformed, author. If you receive a copy of the missive, please file it in the secret round file, and mark it 'never to be opened again'.

Let's start at the beginning and unravel the threads. Firstly, the *Codex Alimentarius* is a document produced by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC; www.codexalimentarius.net), an organisation created in 1963 by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) of the United Nations to develop food

standards, guidelines and related texts, such as codes of practice, under the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Program. The CAC has developed 'Proposed Draft Guidelines for Vitamin and Mineral Food Supplements' that is the cause of all the fuss. In Section 1 of the document it clearly states that these guidelines apply in those jurisdictions where the products are regulated as foods.

Fact 1: Australia regulates CMs, including all oral vitamin and mineral supplements, as medicines (therapeutic goods). As such, the Codex does not apply to Australia as we do not regulate these products as foods.

Fact 2: The newly emerging trans-Tasman joint agency, where the TGA merges with MedSafe New Zealand, will also regulate these supplements as medicines, so again the Codex will not apply to Australia.

Global awareness

While the Codex will not affect Australia, it is worth knowing that it will have impact in other countries. In those countries where vitamin and mineral supplements are regulated as foods, the Codex intends to set daily maximum limits based on scientific data about safety and the daily intake of these nutrients from other sources. This may limit many of the supplements currently on the market and significantly reduce consumer choice in these jurisdictions. As members of the global community, we need to watch these developments closely.

All the conspirators

Given that the Codex cannot apply to Australia under the *Therapeutic Goods Act 1989* that provides the guidelines for the

TGA, it is highly unlikely (or improbable, dubious or implausible) that the TGA is engaged in a conspiracy to bring this component of the Codex to Australia.

Fact 3: The TGA is very proud of its two-tiered risk-assessment framework that allows for CMs to be Listed on the ARTG as therapeutic goods available to the public.

While I can not presume to speak on behalf of Big Pharma, it is equally dubious that this group is conspiring to see Australian implementation of this component of the Codex.

Fact 4: Many of the companies that make up Big Pharma have seen the inevitable in the ever-growing consumer choice for CMs and have embraced some aspect of CM within their own company. A number of these companies are represented by the Australia Self-Medication Industry, one of the two peak bodies representing the CMs industry to government.

Fact 5: The other peak body, the CHC, does not have a cabal of pharmaceutical members, as suggested in the conspiracy. Instead it represents many large and small CM companies, health-food store operators and most of the industry's consultants. To suggest that the CHC would be involved in such a conspiracy is akin to suggesting that the Australian Cricket Board is clandestinely promoting basketball and, as the saying goes, 'That's just not cricket'. ▀

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