

“Swindle, con, dupe, fleece, rip off, shortchange, deceive, cheat ... carelessness, negligence.”

These are some of the words that come to mind when I see what does or does not happen with regard to proper quality assurance in the natural products industry. Is poor quality assurance intentional? Intentional or not, why do we see a constant, steady stream of data highlighting poor product quality in this industry? Do the suppliers of these products simply want to maximize profits, and thus do little or no legitimate quality assurance verification? Or could it be the clinicians who buy and prescribe these products are not holding their suppliers accountable for quality assurance verification? Whatever the reason, poor quality products exist in the marketplace, and unless clinicians are aware of the situation, they won't be able to avoid them.

Subpotent Chondroitin Sulfate

At my company, we tested chondroitin sulfate products from 5 well-known professional product suppliers say they have excellent quality or assert excellent quality and state they do testing to verify their label claim. Results for all 5 came back subpotent. Not a single product met its label claim—some were close and some were very far off. A reasonable person has to wonder if other products sold by these companies have serious deficiencies as well. Might you be prescribing some of these products to your patients?

Test Results – Look at What We Found

Professional Products Company	Label Claim Per Capsule	Test Result Per Capsule	Percent of Label Claim
#1	400 mg	282 mg	70.5%
#2	500 mg	72.9 mg	14.6%
#3	200 mg	108 mg	54%
#4	400 mg	339 mg	84.8%
#5	444 mg	350 mg	78.8%

Lab and Lab Method Used

We used Covance Labs to conduct the testing. Covance is one of the largest and most trusted labs in the world that does testing on dietary supplements. The lab method used was an official method cited in *The United States Pharmacopoeia (USP, 29th Revision: "Chondroitin Sulfate CPC")*.¹ As far as I know, the CPC method [[what is CPC? spell out if you would]] is one of the most accurate and reliable methods for the quantification of chondroitin sulfate. Some manufacturing companies may challenge the use of this lab method, claiming there are other methods that may give a higher quantification of chondroitin sulfate, but the USP CPC method was used because it is an official method and well accepted in the industry. **[[A higher quantification or a more accurate quantification? That seems to be the real issue!]]**

One Small Slice of Pie

In my experience, this is but one small example of what probably is a widespread issue in the professional products and retail industry. Unless a manufacturing company can satisfactorily prove that they are doing sufficient testing to guard against adulterated, subpotent, super-potent, or contaminated product, one has to assume their products may be poor quality.

Truth or Consequences

If you are providing dietary supplements to your patients from manufacturers that don't test their raw materials and finished products, you are putting your patients at risk. Subpotent product may lead to treatment failure, super-potent products may lead to adverse reactions or toxicity, contaminated products may lead to adverse reactions as well as short- or long-term toxicity. Is it worth the risk? Should you bother to take the time to find out if your suppliers are providing quality-assured product?

The question essentially is whether you are merely "trusting" your natural products suppliers to deliver quality products. I hope not, because trust without proof is not enough. We clinicians should know that the only way quality can be assured is via objective evidence obtained through scientifically valid lab testing, in which we are absolutely certain of the testing standards. Never rely on a supplier's certificate of analysis, which is simply a piece of paper that can say whatever the writer wishes.

Verification vs Trust

Trust is defined as "reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, and surety of a person or thing." Given the numerous product-quality deficiencies published in the past several years, I submit that the natural products industry cannot be trusted and quality assurance from any company must be verified. Verification is defined as "proving the truth of, as by evidence; to ascertain the truth or correctness of, as by examination or research." Trust is reliance on others, while verification is proving the truth by examining evidence. Which sounds more reliable to you?

What You Can Do Now

I developed and wrote a questionnaire that clinicians can use as a supplier quality-assurance verification and certification tool. It is available at *IMCJ's* website, www.imjournal.com. When there, click on Quality Assurance in the left lower side bar, then click on "[Manufacturer Certification and Quality Assurance Self-Audit Form](#)." Please send this questionnaire to each of your natural product suppliers and see what comes back. It asks manufacturers to answer a series of questions, but also asks them for documentation that helps provide verification that they are in fact doing what they claim to be doing. It is easy to answer yes to a question on the form; it is more difficult to provide proof. Thus, the questionnaire asks for proof as well as "Yes" or "No" answers.

If you are unfamiliar with quality assurance issues or need further clarification on how to use the questionnaire tool, I am always available to answer your questions and provide quality assurance information. Please contact me at rickliva@center4health.com.

References:

1. *The United States Pharmacopoeia* 29th Revision: "Chondroitin Sulfate CPC." US Pharmacopoeial Convention, Inc.: Rockville, Maryland: 2006; p. 2306

Are Your Clients Buying Tainted Supplements?

If they are and make the purchase from your clinic, you will be held responsible. How will you know? A movement is afoot. Clinicians are taking matters into their own hands. Send out the “**Manufacturer Certification and Quality Assurance Self-Audit Form.**” This easy-to-use, 4-page form allows you to verify your manufacturers’ product quality...and will save both you and your clients from unnecessary risks.

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