

# HOMEOPATHY DEBATE HEATS UP

**T**he National Association of Boards of Pharmacy has adopted a resolution that state boards should not recognize as a practice standard the use of homeopathic products that lack approval by the Food & Drug Administration and the Homeopathic Pharmacopeial Convention.

The NABP resolution was first proposed by John Block, R.Ph., Ph.D., an NABP District 7 board member, after he attended a homeopathy workshop sponsored by a homeopathic company, which never addressed the controversy surrounding the practice. A professor of medicinal chemistry at Oregon State University, he wrote the resolution to "raise the awareness of pharmacy and heighten the debate" about homeopathy. "I fully appreciate the fact that homeopathic remedies are legal in the United States and that there's a homeopathic pharmacopeia. But that doesn't say that [homeopathic remedies] are efficacious. There's a big difference between selling something and making claims that have not been proven by proper clinical trials."

Homeopathic manufacturers reject this assessment, citing new studies and the basic differences between allopathy, which treats by producing a second

## NABP warns of unapproved products

condition that is antagonistic to the first, and homeopathy, which treats by the law of similars. "It's like mixing apples and oranges. Conventional medicine tries to get homeopathy to conform to its standards, and they are entirely different standards," said Allen Kratz, Pharm.D., owner of HoBoN and HomeoVetIX in Naples, Fla.

Homeopathy supporters cite studies such as the one by David Reilly in the Dec. 10, 1994, edition of *Lancet* as evidence of homeopathy's efficacy.

Block endorses the public's right to choose its treatment but worries that consumers could be misled. However, some R.Ph.s worry that the warnings may eventually cause the banning of homeopathic products in the pharmacy. Judging by some recent lawsuits and petitions, their concern is legitimate (see story below.) "Homeopathics are, by definition, drugs. [Critics are] trying to keep drugs away from the pharmacist," said Kratz.

Vincent Izzo, R.Ph., product manager for OTC medications at Weleda Inc. in Congers, N.Y., said, "If you make it a sub-rosa activity, and pharmacies have to be worried about carrying it, then it will be a clerk in a health-food store that is the authority on this form of medicine. Pharmacists have always had the role of guiding their patients in making decisions about over-the-counter medicines, and it shouldn't be taken away from them."

Block believes that the continuing education programs he's seen have presented a very one-sided view of homeopathy. He thinks R.Ph.s need to learn both the negative and the positive aspects of homeopathy so they can counsel patients honestly and let them determine their own course of action. Kratz supports continuing education, since most pharmacists never learned about homeopathy in college. He believes that education on and acceptance of this subject will increase at the university level, citing the inclusion of his chapter on homeopathy in *Remington's Pharmaceutical Sciences*.

As R.Ph.s debate, the public's interest in homeopathy grows. "Homeopathy is just part of a bigger movement. We're talking homeopathy, herbals, and nutrition," said Kratz.

Block recognizes this movement and the patient's right to try such therapy. But he still cautions R.Ph.s against embracing homeopathy until it has been explained clearly. "We have to be careful that we don't get back into putting on the old medicine-show image."

**Karyn Snyder**

## LAWSUITS ON HOMEOPATHY

In August 1994, Stephen Barrett, M.D., a retired psychiatrist and author of *The Vitamin Pushers: How the Health Food Industry Is Selling America a Bill of Goods*, filed a petition with the Food & Drug Administration to ban the sale of homeopathic remedies. He said the "brazen" advertising of homeopathic drugs prompted his action.

There is no word yet from the FDA about his petition, but Barrett hopes the agency will issue a warning about homeopathy or a regulation against it. "I don't think the government should permit the sale of phony medicines anymore than they do phony stocks," said Barrett.

Apparently, some consumers feel the same way and have filed lawsuits. Donald Driscoll, an attorney in Oakland, Calif., is representing two clients in a total of six lawsuits against homeopathy: One consumer is suing the Longs

and Payless drug chains for selling homeopathic remedies; the other client, a physician, plans to file suits against three homeopathic manufacturers and one drug chain. Both clients claim that the products make false claims of effectiveness and that they are mislabeled. Driscoll said the drug chains are being sued because the sale of homeopathic drugs in pharmacies wrongly legitimizes the products.

"Homeopathic drugs ... are being deliberately sold near the prescription drug areas of drugstores to increase the perception that they are, in fact, drugs. All this, from our perspective, is in breach of pharmacists' fiduciary duties to the people who use the pharmacies," charged Driscoll.

Barrett believes that pharmacists should be aware of these cases. "If Driscoll wins, drugstores in California may find themselves at risk for any product that doesn't work," he said.