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Thursday, September 30 at 6:30 p.m. Eastern Time, North America.
(0001 H Friday, 1 Oct., London Time)

Press Release

www.crnusa.org



Council for Responsible Nutrition

The Science Behind the Supplements

Embargoed until Thursday, Sept. 30, 6:30 p.m. Eastern Time, North America
(0001 H Friday, 1 Oct., London Time)

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**LANCET META-ANALYSIS ON ANTIOXIDANTS AND CANCER—
OLD NEWS WRAPPED IN TABLOID-STYLE HEADLINES
—CRN Says The Lancet is Sacrificing Scientific Integrity for Publicity—**

WASHINGTON, D.C., *September 30, 2004* – A meta-analysis on antioxidant supplements and gastrointestinal cancers in the Oct. 2, 2004 issue of *The Lancet* rightly points out the need for more long-term studies in this area, but in an effort to draw headlines, *The Lancet* takes an incendiary quote from an accompanying commentary out of context and ignores the authors' conclusion that the findings are exploratory and preliminary.

“It’s not news to say that we don’t know for sure what might prevent cancer,” says Annette Dickinson, Ph.D., president for the Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN). “At the same time, it’s unfortunate that of the fourteen studies reviewed in the meta-analysis, only three focused on healthy people. While studies can successfully draw upon unhealthy populations to find solutions for healthy populations, antioxidant supplements in and of themselves should not be expected to reverse the negative effects created by a lifetime of smoking or poor dietary habits.”

In addition, Dr. Dickinson points out that clinical trials in high risk people using a single nutrient do not really test the hypothesis that a diet (including supplements) rich in a variety of antioxidants

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is protective against a variety of natural insults ranging from cancer to heart disease, cataracts to dementia, and low immune function to bad gums.

According to Dr. Dickinson, “Most consumers take antioxidant supplements for the wide range of health benefits they provide. These benefits include protective effects against some cancers but also strengthening disease resistance, preserving eyesight, and maintaining mental function. These benefits and others can be gained through healthy lifestyle choices like regular exercise, proper nutrition and long-term use of some dietary supplements.”

CRN’s John Hathcock, Ph.D., vice president, scientific and international affairs, stresses the point that the effect of comparing different supplements in the same meta-analysis results in violating a primary rule of meta-analysis—combining only similar studies—and discounts the valuable information one would otherwise learn about the individual supplements. Says Dr. Hathcock, “Averaging out the effect of beta-carotene and selenium in the same meta-analysis is like saying if you have a husband who is morbidly fat with a wife who is morbidly thin, you’ve got a couple with an ideal weight.”

But what is most alarming is the publication’s tabloid-style use of a misleading, unfounded conclusion gleaned not from the actual study but from the commentary, and designed to generate headlines. Unfortunately for the public health this irresponsible approach could lead to inappropriately discouraging consumers from garnering the wide range of important benefits that antioxidants provide.

By using a single incendiary and scientifically inaccurate quote from the commentary in not only their press release but also as the sole focus of their cover, *The Lancet* has effectively moved from prestigious scientific journal to tabloid-style journalism in an effort to create visibility for their magazine. Since, as the commentary authors say, “The mortality analysis in Bjelakovic and colleagues’ review is work in progress, and does not offer convincing proof of hazard,” *The Lancet* owes the public an apology

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for its irresponsible attempt to choose to create publicity over practicing journalistic integrity. Says Dr.

Dickinson, “Lancet’s handling of this article makes it frighteningly clear that we have moved into an age where getting headlines takes precedence over a scientific journal’s responsibility to report without bias.”

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Note to Editor: The Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN), founded in 1973, is a Washington, D.C.-based trade association representing dietary supplement industry ingredient suppliers and manufacturers. CRN members adhere to a strong code of ethics, comply with dosage limits and manufacture dietary supplements to high quality standards under good manufacturing practices. For more information on CRN, visit <http://www.crnusa.org>.