

information regarding this source of support is taken from authors profile available on internet [4].

6. In the advertisement on company website it is mentioned that "Give your child the power of complan thrice a day and see him/her grow twice as fast". In the study Complan was given twice a day and in the advertisement thrice a day is mentioned, which is not supported by this study [2].

After reading this study, two important ethical issues have emerged first; the claims made by company are exaggerated and second, results seem to be generalized to all children without any regard to the study results. Methodological and ethical issues related to the study are; not declaring conflict of interest and source of support by authors, unclear randomization, not following intention to treat principle, and blinding.

I believe there should be some regulation to advertisements especially related to food, nutrition,

drugs and cosmetics. Central or state government should form a committee of experts for analyzing these claims made by companies before they are shown in advertisements. Only high quality research should be allowed to be quoted by companies in these advertisements.

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Misleading Health Claims for Food Products Need to be Banned

I would like to submit my comments on an article titled 'Advertisement of food products for children' [1].

The industry producing food and nutrition supplements indulges sometimes in misleading the medical fraternity and public by giving exaggerated health claims in advertisements, product literature, and product labels. This is done to increase sales and make more profits.

Many countries have laws to regulate marketing and advertising of these products. In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have regulatory responsibility for dietary supplements. Under the Dietary Supplement Health

and Education Act of 1994 (DSHEA), the dietary supplement manufacturer is responsible for ensuring that a dietary supplement is safe before it is marketed [2]. Also, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) of US regulates advertising of dietary supplements in national or regional newspapers and magazines; in radio and TV commercials, including infomercials; through direct mail to consumers; or on the Internet. The FTC requires that all information about supplements be truthful and not misleading. Before disseminating an advertisement, advertisers must have adequate substantiation for all objective product claims. Similarly in European Union, article 16 of the general food law says "Without prejudice to more specific provisions of food law, the labeling, advertising and presentation of food or feed, including their shape, appearance or packaging, the packaging materials used, the manner in which they are arranged and the setting in which they are displayed, and the information which is made available about them through whatever medium, shall not mislead consumers." [3]. In India, the Food

Safety and Standards Authority of India lays down science based standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import, to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption. Article 24 of the FSS act 2006 deals with 'restrictions of advertisement and prohibition as to unfair trade practices'[4]. It says: (i) No advertisement shall be made of any food which is misleading or deceiving or contravenes the provisions of this Act, the rules and regulations made there under; (ii) No person shall engage himself in any unfair trade practice for purpose of promoting the sale, supply, use and consumption of articles of food or adopt any unfair or deceptive practice including the practice of making any statement, whether orally or in writing or by visible representation which (a) falsely represents that the foods are of a particular standard, quality, quantity or grade-composition; (b) makes a false or misleading representation concerning the need for, or the usefulness.

Provided that where a defence is raised to the effect that such guarantee is based on adequate or scientific justification, the burden of proof of such defence shall lie on the person raising such defence.

Similarly, the article 23 (1) of the FSS Act regulates the advertising of food products and says- "No person shall manufacture, distribute, sell or expose for sale or dispatch or deliver to any agent or broker for the purpose of sale, any packaged food products which are not marked and labelled in the manner as may be specified by regulations: Provided that the labels shall not contain any statement, claim, design or device which is false or misleading in any particular concerning the food products contained in the package or concerning the quantity or the nutritive value implying medicinal or therapeutic claims or in relation to the place of origin of the said food products."

As regard the advertisement of the product Pediasure in the print and electronic media [5,6], the information brochure provided to the medical practitioners, and the labelling information on the product tin, the manufacturer (Abbott nutrition) makes following health claims about the product: scientifically formulated to provide complete and

balanced nutrition; clinically proven to provide catch-up growth; clinically proven to reduce sick days; supports brain development; and, enhances height, weight and immunity.

The manufacturer quotes some studies in support of these claims. An analysis of these studies reveals that out of the four quoted studies:

- Three studies, apart from having sub-optimum study designs, involved an explicit conflict of interest as Abbott or Ross company employees are investigators in these studies [7-9] (the manufacturer has not disclosed this fact in the advertisements, product information for medical professionals and product labels).
- The fourth one [10] dealt with the relative contribution of growth deficiency and psychosocial factors to cognitive development in toddlers with infantile anorexia and has no reference to the product – direct or indirect. Still quoted as "supports brain development".

Thus, it is amply clear that in spite of a regulatory mechanism in place to look into the issue of health claims in our country, multinational nutrition companies are openly flouting the rules. This is high time that regulatory bodies should take appropriate actions to stop misleading health claims. Indian Academy of Pediatrics should take a lead in highlighting such issues as its constitution mandates it to act as an advocate of the children of this country.

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