

15446 COMPETITIVE PROBLEMS IN THE DRUG INDUSTRY

used appropriately. Although each is demonstrably effective in one or more conditions, each has equally demonstrable hazards. Some of the side-effects may be only annoying. Others may be serious or fatal.

Only with a knowledge of both the advantages and the potential hazards can a physician select the right drug to prescribe for each patient--to get the maximum benefit with the least possible risk.

In the United States, physicians are given such information--the good and the bad--in what is known as the package insert. In many instances, the essential elements of the package insert are published--if the manufacturer so elects--in PDR, Physicians' Desk Reference. This book, sometimes called the "bible for prescribers," is distributed annually at no cost to every practicing physician.

Although the statements are prepared--and paid for--by the drug industry, no firm is free to make any statements it may desire. Claims for efficacy or usefulness are restricted to those for which the company has submitted convincing scientific evidence to the Food and Drug Administration. All potential hazards must be fully and openly disclosed. In some cases, the company is required to include a special warning, such as "Do not use for trivial conditions."

It is important to emphasize that such information, required by law, is intended only to inform the physician. If he wants, the physician may use the drug for an unapproved indication. He