

15. Notes on conversations with two Spanish physicians, September 1973.

Conversations with two Spanish physicians in Spain September 23, 1973:

Health, in Spain, is considered of a lower level of importance than in the United States as reflected in the fact that the national health agency, Direccion General de Sanidad, is only a section under the Ministry of the Interior and not a department of its own. Also it has in the past been and still largely is ineffective and worse, having been headed by political appointees, such as Franco's daughter's obstetrician (?) - rather than the best trained and best-qualified man. Also money interests and downright corruption (bribery) have controlled the health agency and in particular the Centro Nacional de Farmacobiologia (Control of Medicines) which corresponds to our FDA and which, in Spain, has been "just like the Mafia". The big moneyed pharmaceutical companies can get past laws and prevent laws and rules being passed by their power and bribery. Money rules, absolutely.

However, a year ago for the first time a good well-qualified man, Dr. Federico Bravo Morate, was appointed as Director of Health and another fine man, Dr. Manuel Reol Tejada, was appointed as head of the Centro Nacional de Farmacobiologia. So there may be some changes but the doctors we interviewed believe these two with the best will in the world cannot buck the entrenched powerful interests which have held sway so long and which fit into the whole milieu of Franco Spain. It was the super capitalists, the very rich, fighting the socialists - not Communists - in the Civil War and they won. Spain has been ruled for their benefit ever since, in a very tight dictatorial system. There has been some easing up or he could not have been talking to us in this manner or doing the writing he is. But also there has been clamping down again recently, such as in the selection of the University president.

In this setting, the sale and use of medicines in Spain is ghastly. Anything to make money, both when some drug companies know what they are doing by omitting warnings, directly lying, and denying adverse effects, pushing use of dangerous drugs for all sorts of uses, making "shotgun" combination medicines of up to eight different drugs in one (perfectly incredible things all well documented by one of these physicians.) and also when they don't know what they are doing and through ignorance some companies, such as smaller "kitchen" drug companies, putting out potent medicines without scarcely any information on use. Advertising in freely distributed pharmaceutical companies "journals" fits the pattern of no warnings, even direct lies, push, push, push sales. The whole medicine picture he described is so awful it makes one afraid to put one self in the hands of a doctor in Spain. And the worst of it is, that from these two physician's point of view, it is all done because of greed. As one of the doctors said, only a few people they know in Spain, their close friends, think of money as what it should be "just a help to living"; to all the rest, nearly everyone, money is everything.

The difference in Spain compared to America, in their opinion, is that in the United States we still believe something can be done about it even though money is getting so powerful there (in U.S.) too, we can make changes. Here in Spain, it is impossible. One of the doctors says he is not a cynic when he sounds so hopeless; he is a stoic about the Spanish situation.

He said that Spain has no Public Health but it does have a National Health Service for all the people. However, there is much better private health care for those who can afford it. Two systems and that for the poorer people is definitely inferior. He cited an example of a distant relative of his who in the National Health Service was diagnosed as heart failure (?) but when he finally went to a private doctor, it was diagnosed as aplastic anemia from which he died. He said when National Health Service is as unreliable as this, it is obvious one cannot obtain reliable reports of incidence of aplastic anemia in Spain.

He mentioned a bare possibility of a change for the better because he has heard that the big pharmaceutical companies are asking for stricter laws in labeling. He figures this is an effort to drive out the competition of little businesses but it may work to the good in terms of better labeling.

He said Parke-Davis's new Chloromycetin Monograph and label are good compared to the awful low Spanish standards in labeling but still not good enough for the best health of the people of Spain. When asked if the new label is "appropriate" for Spain, they said "appropriate" for Spain is not the right word since the Monograph and label