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Rx for Tourists: Beware the Foreign Prescription Drug

(By Milton Silverman)

TRAVELERS, especially those heading for Latin America, Southern Europe, Asia, and Africa, have long been accustomed to getting admonitions like these:

- Don't drink the water.
- Don't eat uncooked vegetables.

•Avoid ice cream, whipped cream and other products that may have been made from unpasteurized milk.

Now a new and perhaps far more important warning should be added:

•Beware the physician who prescribes drugs, and also the pharmacist who may both prescribe and dispense them, who may be unaware of the limited value of these products and of their potentially harmful or fatal side-effects.

Last year, after a long, in-depth study in Mexico, Central America and South America, it was disclosed that some of these health professionals are giving out a potentially deadly antibiotic to patients suffering from such trivial infections as tonsillitis and laryngitis.

Some have treated depression with a combination of drugs that can interact to cause death.

Some are keeping patients on steroid hormones for such prolonged periods that some have suffered from bone-softening, pressure fractures of the vertebrae, psychotic changes and flare-ups—sometimes fatal—of latent tuberculosis and other infections.