

We have a welfare program in Louisiana and the most expensive item and most widely prescribed drug in the program, until recently, has been Darvon. The Secretary of Health and Human Resources Administration of Louisiana spoke to me about this. I told him Darvon could be dispensed with and is no longer a drug that the State supplies free. A year ago they did the same thing with some drugs because the bill was tremendous and the budget could not stand it. They took them off the market and we thought we would hear about it, particularly from the State Medical Society but nothing was said and apparently nothing will be said, so far as I know, about Darvon. This was implemented just several weeks ago.

Senator NELSON. You took it out of the welfare program in the State of Louisiana?

Dr. ADRIANI. Yes.

Senator NELSON. That is to say you will not reimburse for it?

Dr. ADRIANI. That is right. If a doctor wants to prescribe it, the patients pay for it.

Senator NELSON. One of the problems cited yesterday by one of the witnesses, more than one as a matter of fact, was that prescription drugs are reimbursable and that nonprescription drugs are not. This witness felt that maybe inducing some doctors to prescribe Darvon, which is reimbursable even though it is not a good analgesic, simply saves the patient some money. Whether or not this is a fact, I do not know.

Dr. ADRIANI. No; I think it is the fact that doctors have been brainwashed that Darvon has some superior quality and are not familiar with the fact that it is a very feeble analgesic. When a drug is added to the hospital formulary, it is done by the Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee. We had to fight to keep Darvon off. Means nothing. Can't remember what I said but it is not important. Codeine has been used and is much more effective than Darvon and certainly aspirin is much more effective. Codeine and aspirin is a very useful combination.

Senator BUMPERS. Mr. Chairman, one question. I was not here yesterday and I am curious. The press has reported the dangers and how many people have died in a day or year from Darvon. What is there about Darvon that makes it more dangerous than aspirin?

Dr. ADRIANI. Well, as I say, it is a central nervous system depressant.

Senator BUMPERS. As I look at the ingredients about the only thing it has that aspirin does not have is caffeine and propoxyphene.

Dr. ADRIANI. Yes. Recent evidence shows that it is a breakdown product that is harmful. Every drug we take is either carried to the liver where it is transformed to another chemical that is less harmful or excreted by the kidney. Occasionally some of the byproducts of a drug are more harmful than the parent compound. The transformation is supposed to reduce the toxicity but with Darvon the toxicity increases.

In the case of aspirin the detoxification occurs very quickly to harmless products. They have found that Darvon is metabolized to a compound called nor-propoxyphene. This has greater toxic effects than Darvon and certain aftereffects. It affects the central nervous system and causes convulsions. It accumulates in the body if you keep taking it. It is not eliminated right away. We refer to the time a drug stays