

was in 1969. The following comment on that is from the Medical Letter, volume 3, page 21:

It has never been convincingly shown that the combination of aspirin, phenacatin and caffeine, as in Fiorinal, has greater analgesic effectiveness than aspirin alone.

Why would you purchase that when aspirin is 70 cents a thousand and Fiorinal is \$9.45 a thousand?

Mr. STATLER. Well, if there are some purchases probably of Fiorinal it is because again of the outpatient prescriptions but as I said before—

Senator NELSON. You mean to say that none of this was bought directly by contract?

Mr. STATLER. Yes; it was bought in response to the demand for prescriptions that were generated by fee-basis physicians, by the outside physicians, but most of the in-house physicians, of the 5,000, they have access to the Medical Letter comments and have formed their judgment, and Fiorinal probably is not standardized for in-house prescription items.

Senator NELSON. But this gets me back to my original question. The contract was for 1969, \$18,106.92 worth of this drug. Regardless of the individual physician's demands, why should the Veterans' Administration spend \$9.45 a thousand when the best evidence in America, by the pharmacologists and clinicians, is that it is no better than aspirin at 70 cents?

Why does not the Veterans' Administration say we will not supply this drug?

Mr. STATLER. By far the biggest purchases are aspirin tablets, and we dispensed 52½ million doses of aspirin and 46½ million doses of phenobarbital as opposed to a few thousand, 100,000, of Fiorinal that we had to buy for prescriptions from the outside.

Senator NELSON. But you are purchasing them and putting them in the veterans' hospitals.

Mr. STATLER. Filling prescriptions for physicians in our outpatient program; yes, sir.

Senator NELSON. All I am saying is that if we are going to have rational prescribing in this country, you have it in your authority to say no, we will not pay \$9.45 a thousand for something that is no better than phenobarbital at 50 cents or aspirin at 70 cents. Why should the taxpayers pay it? They would generally not do that in any teaching hospital in this country, would they?

Dr. WELLS. I think they would. I have had 25 years in teaching hospitals in the United States and I think you would accede to the judgment of the physicians, even though it might be wrong, and even though you had supplied them with information such as we have available.

Senator NELSON. If it happens in the teaching hospitals, then they do not have very good formulary committees. Is there any evidence—the testimony speaks of testing, efficacy, and so forth—do you have any evidence at all from any source that the Medical Letter is wrong and that, in fact, Fiorinal is better than aspirin or phenobarbital?

Dr. WELLS. No, no; we have no such evidence at all.