



THE VOICE

for Women & Families

Warning: Medication for Colds and Flu May Do More Harm Than Good

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National Research Center for Women & Families

We are dedicated to improving the health and safety of adults and children by using research to develop more effective programs and policies.

We don't accept funding from drug companies, so we rely on individual contributions. We welcome donations online, or by check, through United Way (just write in our name) or federal employees can designate

CFC # 11967

Have you ever bought medicine to treat a cold or flu? If you have, keep reading.

Most colds and respiratory infections are caused by viruses, as is the flu. Antibiotics only work against bacteria, not viruses. That's why they do not work for colds or the flu.

Most doctors advise that the best way to treat a cold or the flu is by drinking plenty of fluids and getting some rest. But most patients take over-the-counter medications. Do they work?

What is Safe for Infants and Young Children?

If your young child has a fever or is in pain, it is important to use a safe and effective children's pain medication that is sold over-the-counter (OTC), such as liquid Tylenol. However, OTC cold and flu products combine several kinds of medication, many of which do not work and can be dangerous for young children.

In October 2007, the companies making OTC cough and cold medications for children announced that they would stop selling or promoting their use for children **under the age of 2** because of the potential risks.

This announcement was the result

of criticism by influential doctors and medical associations, warning that these medications do not work for children **under the age of 6** and can be dangerous. When experts held a public meeting to advise the FDA, they concluded that there was no good evidence that these medications work for children **under the age of 12**.

Keeping ineffective cold medication on the market for children ages 2-12 sounds like a compromise that is good for business but not for your child. But, the reality is even worse. Although the companies announced that they would not sell medications for children under 2 years of age, the bottles still say "ask your doctor" about using the medications for that age group.

If you ask your doctor, he or she should say, "Do not use OTC cold and flu products for children under 2, or even for children under 6." If your doctor suggests that you use these medications, we suggest you find a more knowledgeable doctor.

Dr. Josh Sharfstein, a pediatrician who heads up the Department of Health for Baltimore, is one of the doctors and medical groups who asked the FDA to require studies of the safety and effectiveness of these medications in young children. They also asked for labeling to make it clear to consumers that

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Making Medications Safer

With the help of NRC and other advocates for patients and consumers, the new Food and Drug Administration Amendments Act of 2007 reverses the decades-long trend that had weakened consumer safeguards.

A controversial part of the new law requires the FDA to create a Reagan-Udall Foundation to support FDA's work, and in a move that shocked NRC's president Dr. Diana Zuckerman, she has been selected to the foundation's Board of Directors.

"I was opposed to how the law created the Foundation, because only two of the 14 Board members

"Many Members of Congress were getting campaign donations from companies that opposed our efforts, and that clearly influenced the process."

required by law were designated to represent patients and consumers, compared to four required to represent industry (drugs, devices, food, and biotechnology)," explains Dr. Zuckerman. "I was concerned that the patient and consumer voices would be weakened, and was very surprised when I was asked to serve. I decided to join the Board because I think very highly of several other Board members, including former FDA Commissioner Dr. Mark McClellan, who will chair the Board."

"The selection of Dr. Zuckerman is a vote of confidence in her leadership and the importance of the National Research Center for Women & Families," points out Dr. Susan Wood, former head of FDA's Office of Women's Health and current NRC Board member.

As the FDA law was being written, Dr. Zuckerman was one of the few consumer advocates who was invited to testify before Congress. She

testified twice about the need to improve legislation on medical devices, such as implants, contact lenses and lens solution, and laser devices. Her testimony educated Members of Congress about the lower standards FDA uses for the approval of medical devices compared to drugs, and was instrumental in persuading them to examine that review process more carefully.

NRC for Women & Families was one of the most active members of the Patient and Consumer Coalition, an informal group of nonprofit organizations and several former FDA officials, including Dr. Wood, working to protect adults and children from unsafe medical products.

Meeting with Members of Congress and their staff in the House and Senate, coalition members emphasized the need to strengthen FDA independence from the companies they regulate and provide more resources to scrutinize the safety of medical products being sold. In recent years, the FDA has spent most of its resources on approving medical products more quickly, and less on ensuring their safety.

"There were hundreds of lobbyists representing drug and device companies, and about a dozen advocates from nonprofits working very part-time to get our message to Congress," reports Dr. Zuckerman. "It was very frustrating because so many Members of Congress were getting campaign donations from companies that opposed our efforts, and that clearly influenced the process. We had examples that were powerful, however: the blockbuster pain medication Vioxx that increased the risk of stroke and

heart attacks, research showing that antidepressants increased the risk of suicide attempts, people blinded by unsafe contact lens solution, and reports showing that patients were dying from unsafe implants, including heart valves and stents."

The new law:

- Requires the results from most clinical trials to be made public on the Internet, so physicians and consumers will know the risks and benefits, and scientists can examine the accuracy of the reported findings.
- Uses huge medical record databases to detect problems with new medical products and show which treatments work best.
- Requires all print ads to include a toll-free number and Web address to report side effects to the FDA. The FDA could make companies submit their TV ads for review if there are safety concerns, and could charge larger fines for misleading ads.
- Reduces the number of FDA advisory committee members with financial ties to the drug and device companies whose product is under review. (Unfortunately, our efforts to eliminate all these conflicts of interest were unsuccessful.)
- Increases openness, by making public the internal FDA debates on whether or not to approve a medical product.
- Adds millions of dollars for staff through increased industry user fees, some of which can help pay for safety monitoring. FDA gets more authority to require warning labels and post-market safety studies.
- Enhances seafood inspection and requires FDA to establish standards for pet food.

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these products have not been found safe or effective in young children, and for a public education campaign to inform parents of those facts.

We agree: if the medications don't work, they should not be sold. Since children under 6 can easily overdose on these medications and there is no evidence that they work for children that age, the FDA should require large, clear warnings.

The situation is different for children between 6 and 12, because the medications don't seem to do much harm, but we don't know if they have any benefit.

Dr. Sharfstein explained that one reason why parents like these cold medications is they help children fall asleep. But, if a child is having trouble breathing through a stuffy nose, sedating them could be dangerous.

Do cough and cold medications work for adults? The studies are not very good for adults either, but some of these medications seem to work, while others don't.

Remember, combination cold medications that treat many different symptoms are rarely a good choice. It makes more sense to treat only the symptoms that are bothering you.

What About Prescription Meds?

Tamiflu and Relenza are the only medications that have been approved by the FDA for reducing flu symptoms. Neither will cure the flu but they may help prevent the flu if given before exposure. However, side effects of Tamiflu may include self-injury and delirium, especially among children, and Relenza can cause wheezing and lung problems.

Although not effective for colds or

the flu, antibiotics are often prescribed. Using antibiotics too much, too often, or not finishing a prescription reduces their effectiveness and can cause antibiotic resistance.

Antibiotic resistance is when bacteria are exposed to antibiotics and are able to survive by making genes that are resistant to the antibiotic. When harmful bacteria with resistant genes make us sick, antibiotics are no longer an effective treatment.

To cope with the decreasing effectiveness of some antibiotics, new antibiotics have been developed that bacteria are less likely to be resistant to. However, these newer antibiotics, such as Levaquin and Cipro, are much more expensive and have substantial risks and side effects compared to older antibiotics such as amoxicillin.



The bottom line: antibiotics should not be used for colds or the flu. For bacterial infections, older antibiotics should generally be tried first, since they are safer, less expensive, and often equally effective.

Remember: Medications that are safe for adults may harm children, even in lower doses. "Ask your doctor" doesn't help if there are no good studies for your doctor to read. ■

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AWARDS

Honoring Five Trailblazing Women

During most of the 20th century, many talented women were unappreciated, unrecorded, or just unnoticed. Every year, our Foremother Awards Luncheon celebrates five women who overcame barriers to make life better for other women and their families.

On a perfect spring day on the Friday before Mother's Day, the formerly male bastion called the Cosmos Club was awash in estrogen as we honored five trailblazing women: Sophie Altman, creator and executive producer of the world's longest-running TV quiz show, *It's Academic*; Dr. Roselyn Epps, Washington, D.C.'s first health commissioner as well as the

first African American president of the American Medical Women's Association; Dr. Bernice ("Bunny") Sandler,

pre-eminent researcher of classroom and campus discrimination's effects on girls and "mother" of the legal response, Title IX; Helen Thomas, a journalism icon who asked tough questions of every president since JFK; and Carmen Delgado Votaw, an author and advocate who led the Inter-American Commission of Women and National Advisory Committee on Women. Each was asked to talk about how times have changed – or not changed.

Dr. Epps explained, "I chose pediatrics as my career ambition when I was 10 years old and never wavered. My parents encouraged me. Physicians were members of my family for several generations. . . . It did not seem an unusual profes-

sional aspiration for me. However, for many others that I encountered while growing up, not only did the concept of a woman doctor seem unusual, but also it seemed that a female in medical school was taking one of the coveted spaces that could better be filled by a male.

"In 1951, when I applied to medical school, African American women physicians were rare. When I received an invitation for an interview at Howard, I was delighted. My delight became concern as one professor turned to the women and questioned how we planned to practice medicine should we marry and have children. I thought that the

question was sexist and irrelevant, so I ignored it. Perhaps that interview made me more determined to have a life that balanced my medical career and family life.

"Following receipt of my M.D., I married Charles H. Epps, Jr., M.D., my classmate, best friend and boyfriend since our college days. Two of our sons and our daughter became M.D. specialists. One son, a chemical engineer and M.B.A, is a manager in an international corporation.

"Today, in the United States, women comprise more than 50 percent of the medical students. . . . Although some obstacles remain for women and minorities, much progress has been made since the day I went for my interview. Certainly, no professor conducting an interview today would ask a female applicant how she plans to combine her career and family."

In her remarks, Bernice Sandler talked about how Title IX had changed the lives of millions of women and girls. She gave examples such as quotas for women in medical and other professional schools, as well as "smaller" examples, such as her own unfulfilled wishes to become a crossing guard, which only boys were allowed to do at her elementary school. She vowed to keep fighting.

She quoted Mary Chagnon:

*"And they shall beat their pots and pans into printing presses,
And weave their cloth into protest banners.*

*Nations of women shall lift up their voices with other women,
Neither shall they accept discrimination anymore.*

"That may sound apocryphal but it may yet prove to be from the Book of Prophets, for what women and men of good will are learning is the power of politics and the power of change, and the campus and the nation and the world will never again be the same," Dr. Sandler explained.

As she described her career, Carmen Delgado Votaw quoted the Bible, saying, "To whom much is given much shall be required, comes to mind as I survey my long career in the defense and enhancement of the rights of women and families, especially children. The past 30 years have been especially bountiful as women reaped the fruits of our own efforts to expand our horizons, promote our own advancement, and reach our full potential.

"The National Research Center for Women & Families has reviewed my record and has judged that I have met my requirements in this never-ending quest for equality, and for that I am grateful."



Carmen Delgado Votaw, Dr. Bernice Sandler & Dr. Roselyn Epps

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“It is fitting that this event is held at the Cosmos Club, where membership was not open to diverse populations nor women and where women had to use the back door to enter. Roger Baldwin, founder of the ACLU, used to sneak me through the front door even though I was not able to convince him he should resign his membership here, pleading the right of free association was important to him. But he fought from within to change the rules of admission. As usual, we won even if it took a long time.

“To those who have egged me on and supported me ...keep it up, for the road still beckons. To you, my fellow honorees, to our partners and cheering squads, help us pass the torch to future generations of activists to keep urging others to join us as we reach for the stars and the fulfillment of our just dreams. Let us dream on.”

Ill health prevented Sophie Altman from attending, but her daughter, Susan Altman, gave an endearing account of growing up watching her mother work her magic. Helen Thomas was unable to attend the luncheon because she was receiving an honorary degree.

If you would like to nominate a Foremother or be on our host committee for our May 9, 2008 Foremothers luncheon, email Rachel at rh@center4research.org.

In the News

How can I protect my family against MRSA, the antibiotic-resistant staph infections I've heard about?

It may seem that the best solution is to disinfect everything, but actually the opposite is true! Using anti-bacterial products in your kitchen and bathroom do not protect your family members but they do contribute to antibiotic resistance.

However, cleanliness is important. Don't reuse water bottles that are supposed to be recycled – bacteria can grow inside. Keep your kitchen clean. Don't put your purse on the floor of a bathroom. Make sure family members wash their hands often, and especially after touching money, going to the bathroom, touching other people, and before eating.

What's the news behind the Avandia headlines? Is it safe?

Avandia is a blockbuster drug for diabetes, but its safety has been questioned. It's still being sold, but is it safe?

The FDA convened scientific and medical experts to answer that question. They concluded that Avandia increased the risk of death from heart attacks and heart failure. The risks were especially great for diabetics over the age of 65 and those taking insulin as well. Since the goal of diabetes medication is to save lives, why is Avandia still for sale?

Experts disagree on the answer to that question, but we believe that the FDA is reluctant to take Avandia off the market because it does not have sufficient information about the safety of other diabetes drugs. We don't think that is a good reason, since the risks of Avandia are clear. Patients and family members will want to ask their doctors about alternatives to Avandia.

What's the latest in breast cancer research?

Is breast cancer caused by exposures at work, at home, in our communities, or in the personal products we use? The Sister Study needs to enroll 50,000 women whose sisters had breast cancer, to help discover the environmental and genetic causes of breast cancer. It is conducted by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, which is part of NIH. For more information visit www.sisterstudy.org or call toll-free 1-877-4SISTER.

Leaving A Legacy

If we can't live forever, at least we can help keep our legacies alive, as well as the legacies of those most important to us. Creating an internship is a wonderful way to honor a family member, friend, or create your own legacy. Internships provide training that can result in a lifetime of good works, and help NRC make a difference in the lives of adults and children every day (see page 6). You can donate to legacy internships, or establish a new internship or fellowship through a donation of cash or stock, a distribution from a retirement plan or life insurance policy, or a will.

For more information, call Diana at (202) 223-4000 or email her at info@center4research.org

POLICY MATTERS

Continuing the Legacy

One of our first Foremother honorees, **Joy R. Simonson**, a longtime advocate for women whose abrupt dismissal from a National Advisory Council became a cause célèbre, passed away in June. We have named a policy internship in her honor.

Joy had been the director of the National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs for seven years when the Reagan administration installed new members in 1982. The new council's first order of business was to fire her and appoint her replacement, who quickly proposed abolishing the council.

Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA) denounced her firing in a speech on the House floor, and then hired her as a Congressional investigator to scrutinize federal employment and housing programs. She was the oldest Congressional investigator when she retired in 1985. For the next 22 years, she remained an active advocate for women, and in her 80's she served on our National Advisory Board, was President of the Clearinghouse on Women's Issues, served on the Steering Committee of the National Council of Women's Organizations, and was on the Board of OWL.

"She was a wonderful role model, and having an internship in her honor means that she will continue to be a role model," explains Diana Zuckerman, NRC's president. "She was dedicated to helping women across the country, and we want to make sure that she will continue to inspire women of all ages in the future. We will really miss her."

A graduate of Bryn Mawr, Joy moved to Washington, D.C., in the 1940s to work for the War Manpower Commission. In 1945, she worked for the U.N. relief efforts in Egypt and Yugoslavia, then as a

civilian for Army headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany until 1948, when she and her husband returned to Washington.

Among her many accomplishments:



Joy Simonson

first woman to chair the D.C. Alcoholic Beverage Control Board (1964 to 1972); chief hearing examiner for the D.C. Rent Commission; Assistant

Director of the Federal Women's Program of the U.S. Civil Service Commission; president of the D.C. League of Women Voters; vice president of Executive Women in Government; founder of the D.C. Commission for Women; member of the national commission on International Women's Year; and delegate to the 1977 National Women's Conference in Houston. She also attended the U.N. women's conferences in Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985.

Even in her 70s, she was still playing tennis and ice skating on the Reflecting Pool near the Lincoln Memorial. In 1992, Joy was elected to the District of Columbia Women's Hall of Fame.

Candidates for the internship are encouraged to send their applications to info@center4research.org. The internship has been established with support from Joy's children and friends; donations can be made online at NRC's Web site, by check, or through Combined Federal Campaign by designating #11967.

Two Great Legacies

Other legacy internships also keep NRC at peak performance. Thanks to intern Christina Medina, our

Ted Weiss Intern, and other college student interns, NRC reaches out to young women on MySpace and Facebook. She



Christina Medina

linked our web pages on these social networks to students and advocacy organizations, to let them know about important legislation and health issues, including reproductive health and dating violence. In addition, she learned how to lobby Congress and work in coalition with other nonprofit organizations.

A recent graduate of the University of California at Santa Cruz, Christina became interested in race and gender issues while majoring in American Studies and History. After a summer working on health issues at NRC, she now plans to enroll in a graduate program in public health and environmental justice so she can work on health issues affecting women and disenfranchised communities.

"I've gotten to see how a coalition is built and found out about different organizations and how they work," explains Christina. "I've had a chance to see how a coalition agenda is developed. I especially enjoyed the Leadership Training Seminar I participated in with the National Council of Women's Organizations. It covered topics like lobbying, coalition building, advocacy, and non-profits."



Rep. Ted Weiss
years in the U.S. House of

Representative Ted Weiss, in whose honor this internship is named, was known as the "conscience of the Congress" during his

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Representatives. His Congressional oversight hearings were legendary, whether they focused on the safety of medical products, the need to focus more efforts to defeat the AIDS epidemic, or how ideology interfered with science and public policy. Although he died in 1992, the issues he championed are still just as important today.

Joan Dawson is our **Marcy Gross Intern** for the Fall of 2007. Joanie received her MPH from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. She has worked as a cancer information specialist at Johns Hopkins Hospital and as an editorial coordinator at the National Academy of Sciences. She's just returned from working overseas in South Korea as an editor and a freelance writer, and "the internship is a great way to get training and reconnect to health policy initiatives in the U.S. After living in South Korea and Turkey, visiting places like Thailand and Guatemala, and volunteering with women's rights groups, I am passionately committed to helping women escape violence in their own homes and communities."



Joan Dawson

As our Marcy Gross intern, Joanie is focused on projects to reduce violence against women. She is reaching out to women's centers, health centers, sororities, student groups, college professors, and research centers to form a network of affiliates. The initiative is a national project, but Joanie's initial focus will be on colleges in the Washington area.

In addition to distributing NRC's pamphlet on abusive dating relationships, developed by last year's Marcy Gross intern (Lara Long), Joanie is encouraging

colleges to reduce sexual assaults on campus. A DVD produced by Legal Momentum called "*The Undetected Rapist*" can be used for this effort. The DVD features a re-enacted interview of a student describing how he used alcohol and physical pressure to sexually assault female students at frat parties. A study guide, resource materials, and an evaluation are also available.

If you know a college that might be interested in these materials or in partnering with NRC to reduce dating violence, please let us know.

The internship is named for Marcy Gross, long-time champion of women's health, who died in 2005 at the age of 64.



Marcy Gross

As a senior adviser at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Ms. Gross helped build the foundation for federal policies regarding sexual assault and other women's health issues, and co-authored a report that became the basis of the federal Healthy Start Program, aimed at reducing infant mortality and promoting health care for children.

After retiring from the federal government in 2002, Marcy helped organizations dedicated to women's health and safety. "She was wonderfully supportive to our work, and we are honored to be able to continue her legacy with this internship," explains NRC president Dr. Diana Zuckerman. "Marcy and Joanie have a lot of interests in common, so this is a really perfect fit." ■

How can you start a legacy internship? See page 5

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make your life better?
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