

Alliance for Natural Health Press Release □□For immediate release, 19 July 2007□□Please forward to interested persons

UPDATED COCHRANE REVIEW USED TO BASH VITAMIN C SUPPLEMENTATION

A press statement issued yesterday, pre-empting the release of an updated review by the medical review group, the Cochrane Collaboration, has precipitated headlines around the world such as "Vitamin C does not stop colds".

The Alliance for Natural Health (ANH) challenges this interpretation and says that this is little more than another cynical attempt to attack high dose vitamin C supplementation. □□**Dr Robert Verkerk**, executive director of the ANH says, "These headlines have been triggered by a small update to an existing review that does not reflect any significant new research findings. The review maintains all the flaws of the original Cochrane review on vitamin C and the common cold, as published in 2004. This boils down to the blatant misuse of a minor update of a review to make a major news story that is anti-natural health."

Claims that vitamin C is ineffective against the common cold lack scientific foundation. The Cochrane reports on vitamin C are fundamentally flawed, for the following reasons:

1. The range of doses covered is inadequate and does not cover current clinical practice

in the fields of clinical nutrition or ecological medicine. A clinically more relevant review was recently published by Webb & Villamor (*Nutrition Reviews*, 2007; 65(5): 181-217). Doses of vitamin C suitable for treating the common cold should exceed one gram per hour, or more, to the point of bowel tolerance (*Medical Hypotheses*, 1981; 7(11): 1359-76). An amount of 20 grams daily, in divided doses, is 100 times greater than the 200 mg daily dose discussed by Harri Hemilä, from the University of Helsinki, one of the lead authors of the Cochrane review. Showing that doses of one gram or less per day are ineffective is irrelevant. Hemilä and his team have always upheld that people using prophylaxis prior to extreme physical exertion (e.g. marathon runners, soldiers) will benefit from vitamin C supplementation most (*PLoS Medicine*, 2005; 2(6): e168), yet the headlines accompanying the updated review hardly reflect this.

2. The low frequency of doses, in the studies used in the Cochrane review, invalidates the results

[*PLOS Medicine*, 2005; 2(9), e307.]. High doses of vitamin C are excreted rapidly, thus treatment doses should be taken every few hours. The studies cited in the review used doses taken once or twice daily. To take an analogy, one contraceptive pill on the first day of the month, rather than one a day, would not prevent pregnancy.

3. The way the Cochrane review pools the outcomes of different studies

is invalid. Individual studies measure their results in different ways, across varied intakes. Hemilä's team are, it seems, comparing apples with bananas. Also, the selection criteria used in the Cochrane review are subjective, and have little scientific validity (*Journal of Orthomolecular Medicine*; 2007; 22(1),8-10).

□□**Dr Steve Hickey**, of Staffordshire University and Manchester Metropolitan University, also a member of the ANH's Scientific Expert Committee, says, "Meta-analysis, as currently practiced, has a poor scientific basis, and this is particularly the case with the reviews of vitamin C."□□**Dr Damien Downing**, ANH's medical director, who is also president of the British Society for Ecological Medicine and a practising Harley Street physician, added, "Fortunately, large numbers of doctors, practitioners and even consumers know just how effective multiple, daily doses of vitamin C can be for preventing, or reducing the severity of, the common cold and other infections. So many people in today's society are under stress, and frequent 500 mg to 1000 mg doses of vitamin C are one of the most cost effective ways of supporting the body's immune system."

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EDITOR'S NOTES:

About the Cochrane Collaboration □ See: www.cochrane.org

About the Alliance for Natural Health (ANH) □ See: www.anhcampaign.org

The ANH is a UK-based, internationally-focused, legal-scientific, non-governmental organisation that is working on behalf of consumers, medical doctors, complementary health practitioners and food manufacturers and distributors, to protect and promote natural healthcare, using the principles of good science and good law. □□ The ANH's principal objective is to help develop an appropriate legal-scientific framework and environment for the development of sustainable approaches to healthcare. Within this setting, consumers and health professionals should be able to make informed choices about a wide range of health options, and in particular those that relate to diet, lifestyle and non-drug-based or natural therapies, so that they may experience their benefits to the full, while not exposing themselves to unnecessary risks.

BBC News item, 18 July 2007, Vitamin C 'does not stop colds' □ See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/6901405.stm>