



Hearing Summary

HEARING ON "MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT HUMAN GROWTH HORMONE, B-12, AND OTHER SUBSTANCES"

Rep. Henry A. Waxman

Chairman, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Vitamin B-12 and human growth hormone (HGH) are touted by some as miracle drugs that will increase energy and will counter the effects of aging. However, there is scant scientific evidence to support these claims and there is evidence of potential harm resulting from their use. The Committee held a hearing to examine the myths and facts about these substances. Four distinguished medical experts testified.

Dr. Susan Shurin, the Deputy Director of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute at the National Institutes of Health, described the state of the science on Vitamin B-12. She testified that injectable B-12 is typically necessary only when there is a problem with the intestinal tract, and excess B-12 does not improve health or performance. Dr. Shurin also testified that adverse effects of a B-12 shot are very uncommon.

Dr. Thomas T. Perls, the Director of the New England Centenarian Study at Boston University School of Medicine, spoke about the "growth hormone craze." Dr. Perls testified that based on unsubstantiated claims of reversing aging and enhancing sports performance, HGH has become widely and inappropriately used in an industry estimated at \$2 billion each year. He testified that there are only a few rare conditions that merit the use of growth hormone in adults, noting that HGH is the only drug subject to a statutory prohibition against use for unapproved indications. Finally, Dr. Perls noted that HGH may in fact shorten lifespan and is associated with certain cancers, problems with the heart, liver, and diabetes.

Dr. Alan D. Rogol, a pediatric endocrinologist, discussed the appropriate uses of HGH in children, which are quite rare. He testified that there is no data to suggest that HGH enhances performance, though it may enhance appearance by breaking down some fat tissue. Dr. Rogol discussed survey data which suggest that as many as 12% of high schoolers are using what they believe to be HGH, but that much of this may in fact be other products of unknown derivation. He noted that the immature brains of young athletes may not be as equipped to understand the future consequences of such actions: "if they could win a gold medal, they didn't care what happened 10 or 20 years down the road."

Dr. Todd Schlifstein, a practicing sports medicine physician at the Hospital for Joint Diseases in New York City, described the use of HGH among his athlete patients. He testified that there is widespread belief amongst athletes that HGH enhances performance when used in conjunction with steroids. He also testified about the use of lidocaine, an injectable drug that temporarily numbs an area and is usually only used in combination with a cortisone shot. According to Dr. Schlifstein, a trainer should not be performing these injections because lidocaine, when used improperly, can cause arrhythmias and seizures.

Additional information, including Chairman Waxman's statement and copies of testimony, is available online at www.oversight.house.gov.