

# The value of nutritional supplementation

Paul Pimentel

Two landmark studies published in 2002 virtually changed the opinion of the American Medical Association (AMA) regarding nutritional supplementation overnight, yet 5 years later, many physicians don't recognize the value of supplementation, according to one nutritional supplements expert.

"The AMA – largely as a result of those two papers – now says you need to supplement, but you still have physicians out there who say: 'You can take them if you want but they won't do you any good,'" says Mr. Lyle MacWilliam, biochemist and author of *A Comparative Guide to Nutritional Supplements*, a compendium assessing more than 1,500 nutritional health products. MacWilliam is a former Canadian Member of Parliament who worked with the Canadian government to develop a regulatory framework for natural health products.

The two papers, written by Harvard researchers Dr. Robert Fletcher and Dr. Kathleen Fairfield, involved a systematic review of 38 years of epidemiological evidence regarding supplementation.

The review revealed that "sub-optimal intake of some vitamins, above levels causing classic vita-

and folic acid was effective in the secondary prevention of myocardial infarction (MI), stroke, and sudden death attributed to coronary artery disease in patients who already had an acute MI. The trial followed 3,749 patients for 40 months. Patients were randomized to receive one of the following interventions: .8 mg of folic acid, .4 mg of vitamin B12, and 40 mg of vitamin B6; .8 mg of folic acid and .4 mg of vitamin B12; 40 mg of vitamin B6; or placebo. The study's authors concluded that: "Treatment with B vitamins did not lower the risk of recurrent cardiovascular disease after an MI." [*N Engl J Med* 2006 Apr 13;354(15):1578-88]

"What they were saying was that vitamin supplementation didn't seem to make any difference," said MacWilliam. "It probably didn't because these people were already very sick. I think supplementation is most beneficial in primary prevention."



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sion about supplementation, according to MacWilliam who contends that: "At any age, getting on a good quality nutritional supplement is going to be of benefit."

"In other words, what is in the bottle, can't match what's on the label," says MacWilliams. While some jurisdictions, such as Canada and Australia, have moved to regulate the nutritional supplements industry, meaning that there is some assurance that what's in the bottle matches what's on the label in those markets, this has not happened yet in the US.

"This is really pertinent to the market in Singapore because so

many of the products sold here are US-based products," says MacWilliam. Some nutritional supplement manufacturers, however, do adhere to pharmaceutical standards, and it is these that should be sought out.

In selecting a nutritional supplement, one should look for a broad-spectrum, high-potency supplement, that guarantees that it's been manufactured to pharmaceutical quality on the bottle, he concluded.



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