

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Q: What makes for a quality supplement?

Supplements are a huge industry in this country. Recently, a random sampling of these products was tested, and approximately 6 out of 10 fell short of their advertised claims. Some did not contain the dosage stated on the package, while others contained fillers, and one was even lacking any trace of the herb on the label. It is important to check



Auld

See QUESTION » D9

Question

Continued from D1

the country of origin for these items. Herbal medicines from Europe, and Germany in particular, were found to be excellent, as they apply the same oversight in production for supplements as they do for prescription medications.

Supplements made in India, on the other hand, have been found to be contaminated with dirt and heavy metals. Those produced in China have been cited for containing many added drugs and

herbs besides those listed on the label.

In the United States, a concerted effort has been made to improve the quality of our supplements, which are not generally regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. Look for a stamp on the package that says GMP, which stands for "Good Manufacturing Practices," and indicates that it was inspected by an outside lab and found to contain what the label states. USP is another symbol found on quality products. This indicates that it has the stamp of approval from the United

States Pharmacopeia, a group committed to improving the standards of labeling and quality control.

It's not always easy to find supplements with good quality labeling. I recently went to a health store for a specific product and not one of the six brands on the shelf had either a GMP or a USP seal. So, buyer beware! Carefully read the label.

Heather Auld, M.D., and Fellow at the University of Arizona Department of Integrative Medicine is an obstetrician/gynecologist with Physicians' Primary Care of Southwest Florida in the Park Royal office, 9021 Park Royal Drive, Fort Myers. Call 432-5858.