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HERBCLIP

FILE: · Viagra
· Impotence $\frac{3}{4}$ Male

DATE: July 29, 1998

HC 053188

RE: **Viagra Craze Grows**

Petersen, Andrea. Get Ready for the Viagra Wannabes. *Wall Street Journal*. April 30, 1998, pg. B1.

Johannes, Laura. Viagra Craze Gives Irwin Goldstein Superstar Status in Health-care Field. *Wall Street Journal*, Interactive Edition, May 14, 1998.

Jeffrey, Nancy Ann. Pfizer Tells FDA Six Have Died After Taking Impotence Drug. *Wall Street Journal*, Interactive Edition, May 22, 1998.

Since its introduction in April, every aspect of the impotence treatment Viagra, the nation's most-prescribed new drug, has been covered by the nation's leading business daily. In the process, some double-standards in the way the media perceives herbs and drugs have been highlighted.

For instance, Viagra manufacturer Pfizer has made it clear from the start that the medication is potentially dangerous for men with heart disease. Nevertheless, a *Journal* article dismissed Viagra's "minor side effects, such as indigestion and vision blurring," and in the same article warned that the controversial herb yohimbe (*Pausinystalia yohimbe*), often used as an impotence remedy, can "raise blood pressure and cause irregular heart beats."

Two weeks later, when the news broke that at least six Viagra consumers had died, the *Journal* wrote that "the FDA continues to believe the drug is safe and effective for its labeled indication and intended patient population," i.e.: men free of heart problems. Pfizer had specifically warned that nitrates, such as nitroglycerin, used by heart patients, should not be combined with Viagra. Whether the drug also poses a direct challenge to the unhealthy heart in a manner similar to yohimbe, is a very interesting question.

The Viagra situation highlights an American medical reality: that doctors can prescribe a drug to anyone, for virtually any purpose, once the FDA approves

the drug for a *specific use*. Additionally, impotence is a common side effect of heart disease, raising the odds that patients requesting the drug could be risking complications.

Although yohimbe is potentially “dangerous,” there are few reports of fatalities despite very widespread use. The most significant difference is that the herb is available at consumers’ discretion, whereas the drug is available at doctor’s discretion. Another *Journal* article gives an example of the prescribing behavior of Dr. Irwin Goldstein, the M.D. credited with creating the demand for Viagra. Despite the fact that clinical safety trials in women are just getting underway, Dr. Goldstein is “trying Viagra on women because it is relatively safe and acts to improve blood circulation.” On hearing that one of his patients mixed Viagra with “old-line injection [impotence] medicines,” another unapproved use, and suffered priapism, an erection lasting several hours and potentially causing permanent penile damage, Dr. Goldstein said, “it’s alright to mix medications,” but that the patient should have called him sooner to deal with the condition. Goldstein is crusading to stop men from riding bicycles because he believes it causes impotence.

As of May 22, doctors had written more than a million prescriptions for Viagra. After the fatalities announcement, Pfizer stock dropped slightly, from \$109.125 to \$105.4375. —*Betsy Levy*

Due to prohibitive costs required by *Wall Street Journal*, ABC has chosen not to enclose the original articles.

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