

MEDICAL REFORM GROUP

Box 40074, Toronto, Ontario M6B 4K4

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MEDICAL REFORM GROUP CALLS FOR GREATER TRANSPARENCY IN DRUG APPROVALS

Medical Reform Group member Dr. Joel Lexchin appears today before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health with 4 recommendations for enhancing public involvement in policy making on drug regulation and safety. The MRG recommendations seek to enhance public involvement by calling for public hearings with web posting of clinical information used at all stages in the approval process, and rigorous conflict of interest standards for expert reviewers.

Since Health Canada moved to a cost recovery strategy in the 1990s, approval times for new drugs have dropped significantly. Bill c-212, which provides penalties for government departments which do not meet approval targets, could have even more dire consequences for the health and safety of Canadians, according to Lexchin.

“In fact,” he says, “we are very concerned that Health Canada appears to be abandoning the precautionary principle in favour of risk management with its attendant dangers.”

The MRG brief to the commons committee also highlights concerns that too little attention is paid to monitoring drugs already approved after a process which rushes them to market before they have been adequately assessed.

In summarizing his findings, Dr. Lexchin said, “Health Canada places so little emphasis on drug safety issues that it cannot even provide a list of all the drugs withdrawn from the market for safety reasons, and has no explanation for the dramatic increase, since 1992, in the number of these drugs.”

“Drug regulation in Canada is shrouded in secrecy. Even the names of drugs in the approval process are not disclosed and all of the information that industry submits, including clinical trial data on safety and efficacy, is deemed confidential and can only be released with the permission of the company even with an Access to Information request.”

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For more information:

Dr. Joel Lexchin, (416) 736-2100 xx 22119 or (416) 964-7186

Janet Maher (416) 770-1311

(416) 787-5246 [voice]; (416) 352-1454 [fax]; medicalreform@sympatico.ca [e-mail]