



## Food and Drug Administration

In 1905, Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle* was published and became a best seller. He would say that he "aimed at the public's heart and hit their stomach." Sinclair was a socialist, and the book was intended to move the nation toward socialism. The book's description of the meat-packing industry was so shocking that it caused public outrage, and Congress passed the Food and Drug Act in 1906. Since that time, manufacturers of food and drugs have had to go through testing to prove their products are safe to sell in the United States. Over-the-counter drugs were regulated and controlled.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century became a century of scientific change: plastics, synthetic cloths and miracle drugs like penicillin were developed. Then in 1954, a new drug came on the market in Germany as an alternative to barbiturate sedatives. That drug was thalidomide. It was widely used in at least 40 nations by 1960. When the drug had reports circulating about nerve damage and malformed babies, they were at best ignored except in the United States.

The American Food and Drug Administration did not approve the drug for use in the United States and were still testing it. That did not prevent American travelers in Europe and Canada from having the drug prescriptions filled on vacations. The news report became national news when there were over 10,000 babies born with defects in 46 nations, and the drug was taken off the market. If the FDA had gone ahead and approved the drug, the number of babies born with defects in the United States would undoubtedly have been higher than the 19 that were.

When I heard that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) is taking a long time to develop a vaccination against the COVID-19 virus, I remembered the thalidomide fiasco. Thalidomide doses have medical benefits today. All things have "mirror images," like your body does. The right side is a mirror image of your left, but not exactly the same image. Drugs also have the mirror image, and if you study the one side of the image and ignore the other side, you get the thalidomide problem.

Today, thalidomide is used in treatment of leprosy and shows some positive results in the treatment of cancer. The other half of the mirror image benefits. We must remember that it was a little over a hundred years ago that the "snake oil" sales were the rule and not the exception. That those cola drinks actually had cocaine as an additive, and opium could be purchased over the counter.

The CDC may take its time, but it is for our protection.

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