

Discussion Contribution:
Policies on the Borderline Between Drugs and Foods
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It is important that drug policies intended to protect the public are applied not only to drugs as such but also to various borderline areas where certain products may otherwise escape regulation by being re-classified, for example as foods or nutrition supplements.

A serious example concerned ephedra-containing weight-reduction products which were re-classified in the US a decade ago as nutrition supplements. No longer subject to FDA regulation, and of variable quality and composition, they led to multiple deaths because of the cardiovascular effects of ephedra compounds. In many countries, vitamins as well as minerals and trace elements now escape drug regulation, and are promoted in an uncontrolled manner. One current example is the addition of vitamin E to Gillette razor blades because of a supposed ability to soften the skin and promote wound healing (Fig. 1). This spring, Coca Cola is introducing a version of Diet Coke containing as yet undisclosed amounts of vitamins and minerals (Fig.2). If in such products vitamins and other supplements are present in insignificant quantities as a marketing ploy, this is misleading. If they are present in a significant amount these substances may also produce adverse effects.*



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

*Helsing E (2000): *Vitamins*. In: Dukes M.N.G. and Aronsen J.K. (eds): *Meyler's Side Effects of Drugs*, Elsevier, Amsterdam, at pp.1338-1363