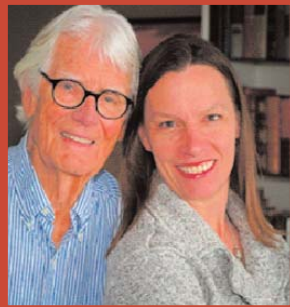


# HEALTH CORNER



## Pity the Overworked Family Doctor

By W. Gifford-Jones MD and Diana Gifford

Everyone knows, or should know, about the many problems facing your overworked family doctor. In North America, it's common knowledge that large numbers of individuals and families do not have one. They are a scarce healthcare commodity. Now, on top of the heavy workload these doctors carry, the pharmaceutical industry has placed another burdensome task. So, what is this problem?

It happens night after night. You hear the messy and worrying news from around the world. You begin to wonder why humans continue to destroy cities and cause so much needless human suffering. Then come the equally despairing commercials reminding you about all the things that can go wrong with your health - and all the pills that can fix these problems. This is big business, as every year without the sanction of the medical profession, the pharmaceutical industry makes billions and billions.

The commercials show ads about many common problems, such as skin rashes and upset stomachs. Some of these troubles require a doctor's prescription and some an over-the-counter remedy. Many ads target diabetics with pills that control blood sugar, adding, "This drug isn't indicated for weight loss; however, we have found that some patients lose weight."

The ads show happy people playing with their dogs, leaping joyfully into a lake, which has nothing to do with the health issue. But you must give credit to the pharmaceutical industry. These ads are effective and make shareholders in their companies the happy and richer ones.

But here's the rub for family doctors. To cover any legal or medical liability, these ads always include a standard message. Having delivered the good news that their medication will solve your problems, they state that you should consult with your doctor. It works well for these firms: they shift the medical liability for one, and the reference to the doctor as an authority adds a sense of endorsement of these products for another.

Now, we should ask what does your doctor really know about these products? In view of the large number of new drugs promoted on TV, your doctor may know absolutely zero. Moreover, with busy practices, and so many patients waiting, family doctors don't have a lot of time to find out.

How much time do family doctors spend answering patients' questions about all these drugs? The "ask your doctor" mantra from pharmaceutical companies must pose a major distraction from what these doctors would be doing otherwise in discussions with their patients.

Being a family doctor is not an easy task. This is not to suggest that it's a walk in the park being a specialist. But, after several more years of medical training in one area of medicine or surgery, there are fewer and fewer surprises. Family doctors see every kind of issue one can imagine. And

it's simply not fair, nor a good idea, to expect them to have mastery across a huge range of medications for every kind of health problem.

If pharmaceutical companies want to speak directly to consumers about their products, let's make it a worthwhile discussion. They should make their product information available in large print and enable patients to ask questions and get answers. They should be held to account when they overembellish the benefits or hide side-effects of their products. And they should thank doctors for the time they must spend in building expertise.

But until that happens, you, the consumer, must beware. Remember, their goal is to sell a product, not to care one iota about your health. That's the job of your family doctor.

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Tammy Pearce - I want to thank Robinson's Haunt for her generous sponsorship for our son's Prestons SNHL hockey! Without your sponsorship our son would have had to stop playing hockey this year... You are amazing!!! Keep fighting and stay strong!!!

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## For Son's Sake

from Wayne & Tamara



I have been with my husband 20 years, and he is an alcoholic. His father and brother are alcoholics as well. My husband witnessed violence in his home growing up, and still to this day it goes on. I recently made him leave my house because he is abusive while drinking and doesn't remember it. This is affecting my 16-year-old son as well. He is the sweetest kid, and I know this hurts him a lot. I do not want to leave my husband because he is the best person when he isn't drinking. I want him to get help, but I do not know how to get it. As long as his mother is

enabling him, I know he won't get help.

I want him to get help so we could be a family. My son asked me if we were the only family going through this. I've tried to tell him we aren't. I know it will be hard on him if his father leaves because we will also lose a big family.

Elsa

Elsa, army ants marching in a column sometimes become confused. The lead ants stumble across the tail of the column and start to follow the stragglers. All the ants then march in a circle, going nowhere, until they die from exhaustion. That is what living in a multigenerational alcoholic family is like.

You are concerned for your son, and you should be. Children of alcoholics endure thousands of days during which they have no control over the turmoil around them. To survive they bury their feelings. They become people pleasers who cannot trust themselves. Not surprisingly, they fail to learn workable solutions to problems. How could they? The central problem of their life is a problem over which they have no control.

The first step in recovery for an alcoholic is to admit the problem. The second step is to admit they haven't done the first step. The third step is to actually do something. What is true of the drunk is true of the enabler of the drunk. If you have been with your husband 20 years, you are his enabler.

What is an enabler? An enabler is a person who has the power to change a situation but refuses to do it. When you made your husband leave the house, you took the first step toward not being his enabler. You cannot control his alcoholism, but you can stop enabling it.

It sounds noble to say you don't want to lose a big family, but the family you're talking about is one where screams and punches and children cowering in closets are commonplace. That is a pattern which must be broken.

Unlike the army ants, if you break this pattern of circular behavior, the only one who is likely to follow you is your son. Breaking the pattern will be hard, but it will be the making of you as a person.

Wayne & Tamara

## Art Of Living

I've been reading your column for two years and ordered your book after my marriage went belly up. Just as I resolved I could live my life without a man, I met someone in one of the most unlikely places, a chat room. We really hit it off even though we couldn't be more different, yet all of our differences seem not to matter.

It happens to be my 38th birthday today, and I can't tell you how wonderful it is to be at peace with my life. I don't know how my story will end, but I know I will be all right no matter what, whether we spend the rest of our lives together or just a couple of days, weeks, or months. Thank you for articulating what I have always felt.

Nell

Nell, once we understand how to live within our own skin, life always seems good.

Wayne & Tamara

SEND LETTERS TO: [Directanswers@WayneAndTamara.com](mailto:Directanswers@WayneAndTamara.com)

Wayne & Tamara are the authors of *Cheating in a Nutshell* and *The Young Woman's Guide to Older Men*—available from Amazon, Apple, and booksellers everywhere.