

Monday, April 25, 1994

The News Record

## Vitamins can't cure everything

Rickets — D, Night Blindness — A, Scurvy — C. If someone preparing for exams thinks this reminds him of impending multiple choice questions, I won't blame him. But a majority of the readers would have guessed that I am referring to vitamins — vitamins D is essential in the prevention of rickets, night blindness is a result of low intake of vitamin A, vitamin C deficiency leads to scurvy, and so on. That is what I learned in high school.

But once I stepped into real life, I found people could treat a variety of illnesses by just popping vitamins. I know a strong advocate of vitamin C who uses it to stop his running nose. Though Nobel laureates supported his theory, I still found his nose always dripping, if not running. He does have a perfectly logical explanation for this, however — each time vitamin C stops a virus, a new strain of virus attacks.

Then, I met an eternally worried man with at least one or two ulcers. He swallowed pills regularly. One day, when I got to know him better, he confided, "There is nothing like B complex vitamins to relieve the problems of PMS in my wife, you know." He then promptly swallowed a pill. "What is that for?" I asked him. "This is my personal discovery, my pal. I found the vitamins help me to cope with my wife's PMS better." Of course, there are people who dine on



**Pulikal  
Bhaskar**  
**Guest  
Columnist**

other members of the alphabet for the same reason some search for Rhino's horn, and others play it safe by taking multivitamins. I wonder what percentage of vitamins are actually consumed for deficiency reasons?

If we had to rewrite only the sections on vitamins in the textbooks because of the new uses we have found for the supplements, this would be OK. But now, we are also discovering that a variety of symptoms can be treated with other medications. The current fad is to go in for mood elevators and confidence boosters.

These tablets are supposed to be nonaddictive. If we trust the confessions of the people using them, these medications help people to be in a calm and happy frame of mind, even in periods of intense personal grief. There is already a debate going on concerning the necessity of such emotional blockers. It may not be long before people can just go to the newest pharmacist and buy a "joy" tablet or a "sad" tablet to assume the

mood appropriate for certain occasions. Then, what is the actual emotional personality of that person?

Recent news items on medical developments warrant attention. First, reports tell us that vitamin A could aid in the curing of cancer. But other recent studies indicate that this vitamin increases the risk of cancer. This only proves we are still treading on unknown ground.

Nobody is certain of the long-term effects of pills like vitamins or antidepressants. There is no such thing as a harmless tablet. Experimenting with legal medications for questionable reasons is another form of drug abuse, and it is perhaps as serious as consuming narcotics.

Dreams about perfect health and longevity have been around a long time. People in ancient times spent their lives in search of the talisman. We have yet to discover it. But people like to believe that the talisman is somewhere, maybe in vitamins or in the new antidepressants or somewhere else.

And in the process, one forgets that science has indeed dramatically improved the quality of health and longevity in the recent years, and that doesn't require any pill-popping on a regular basis.

*Pulikal Bhaskar is a graduate student in business and a staff columnist for The News Record.*