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September 15, 2009

The Honorable Thomas Harkin
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Harkin:

Congratulations on your appointment as chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. As an independent research group, we have seen the many contributions that dietary supplements can make to wellness and immune health and the lack of acknowledgement for these contributions in the medical and scientific communities. It is our view that one of the cornerstones of healthcare reform is going to involve the reframing of our definitions of mortality and morbidity. Typically, we attribute preventable deaths to "disease" such as heart disease. But the root causes of heart disease is from unhealthy lifestyles. For healthcare reform to succeed, we will devote resources to how to improve lifestyles, which will, of course, ultimately reduce heart disease.

This point was made forcefully 16 years ago in a 1993 study analyzing mortality, revealing that of the two million deaths per year in the US, half were premature deaths - the leading root causes of which were tobacco use, dietary habits and low physical activity levels. More recently, a 2004 analysis concluded that 800,000 premature deaths in 1990 were the result of the same three causes. In August 2009, in their article entitled "Healthy Living is the Best Revenge" the researchers reported their study of 23,000 German adults, and concluded that the instances of chronic disease were largely accounted for by the same three behaviors. These data from the German study show the unfulfilled potential of preventing chronic diseases by adhering to four lifestyle factors (smoking, BMI <30, physical activity, and improved diets) that can potentially yield enormous reductions in the onset of major chronic diseases such as CVD, diabetes, and cancer. These researchers conclude that improving even one of these factors can increase the time free of these conditions. Further gains accrue as the number of such factors increases.

Taken together, their research and that of other investigators emphasize the importance and urgency of continuing vigorous efforts to convince people to adopt health-enhancing lifestyles. The same is true even when confronted with genetic profiles that appear to destine some people to sub-standard health. However, gene handicaps can be overcome. As recently pointed out by Dr. D.L. Katz, "We have studies to show that even gene expression submits to the power of lifestyle. Thus, the perennial debate of nature versus nurture describes a false dichotomy. With the knowledge we have already in hand, we can nurture nature."

It is our view that the conclusions stated above provide a clarion call for the nutritional industry's involvement in healthcare reform, particularly in view of the emerging interest in, and funding for, Comparative Effectiveness Research (CER). In that regard, I am attaching a manuscript entitled "Comparative Effectiveness Research (CER): Opportunities and Challenges for the Nutritional Industry" (Atch 1). The manuscript has been accepted for publication in *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*. While you are free to circulate this pre-publication copy among your staff, please limit its distribution until it appears in print or on line next month.

In addition to making a case for increased involvement of nutritional supplements, on page 4 of the manuscript, it makes reference to a CER study on bone health that has been submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. The article is entitled, “Bone Mineral Density Changes in a Bone Health Plan Using Two Versions of a Bone Health Supplement: A Comparative Research Study in Response to the US Surgeon General’s “Call to Action”. The Surgeon General’s “call to action” is to develop programs to help reverse America’s declining bone health. This trend in our nation’s bone health poses a serious financial threat to our healthcare system. I have included a copy of the manuscript at Atch 2. This study provides rather compelling evidence for the value of a plant-sourced, nutritionally enhanced, form of calcium in supporting bone health.

Both of the attached manuscripts refer to a 2008 book I published entitled “*Restructuring Body Composition: How the kind, not the amount, of weight loss defines a pathway to optimal health*”. I have enclosed a signed copy of the book. It cites examples of the value of glyconutritional supplements to enhance immune health from a 14-year independent clinical trial we conducted. However, its message was designed to go beyond the research findings cited in the book and provide some evidence-based, practical guidelines on how to make changes in two of the three root causes of premature deaths - improved diets and physical activity levels.

If there is anything I can do to further your efforts, please contact me, or have your staff do so.

Sincerely,

Gilbert R. Kaats, PhD