



## *From the MAFP Presidents Pen -*

### **FDA Overreach or Appropriate Government Consumer Protection?**

By William Sturrock MD, MAFP President  
September 10, 2016

On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, the federal Food and Drug Agency (FDA) issued a rule prohibiting the use of triclosan, triclocarban and 17 other anti-bacterial chemicals in soap products. Companies will have one year to remove these ingredients from their products, although exceptions remain for products used in healthcare and food-service settings. For clarification, this ruling does not apply to the still recommended use of hand-sanitizer gels which have been shown to decrease skin-to-skin transmission of a wide number of pathogens. However there remain many products that contain these chemicals, from some toothpaste to the anti-bacterial bath soap 'Dial' that many people use in their daily shower.

So given the common sense concern for preventing the transmission of troublesome germs such as MRSA and C-diff why is the FDA taking this recent action? To answer this question, we have to go back to 1994 when the FDA first allowed these chemicals to be added to soap products, with the encouragement for manufacturers to perform after market research into their safety. The early 1990's were a time of significant deregulation across a wide swath of industries, with the justification that the free market, not 'big government' would be the consumer's best friend. It was during these years that we saw the first pharmaceutical commercials on TV, not to mention the first lawyer's advertisements promising to go after the doctors using any of these 'bad drugs'.

Since then, not only has there been no data demonstrating that these anti-bacterial products can actually prevent illness, there is now growing evidence that some of these chemicals can significantly disrupt hormone cycles and may play a role in the development of some cancers. Controlled experiments with laboratory animals have shown that these products can interfere



## *From the MAFP Presidents Pen -*

with thyroid and testosterone production, as well as stimulate estrogen sensitive tissues. This latter effect in particular is of concern to breast cancer researchers. That many chemicals in our environment can play these roles is increasingly accepted by toxicologists, but to apply these products daily to our skin may go beyond the occasional unintended exposure. Other known sources of these hormone toxins include polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's) found in multiple electrical appliances made prior to 1977 and still leaching into our ground water, bisphenol A (BPA) found in many plastics and food containers, as well as many pesticides.

Many will remember back in 2011 when Maine's Governor LePage criticized proposed legislation to limit exposures of BPA found in the lining of food cans, including beer and soda containers: "the worst case is some women may have little beards". Unfortunately experts now tell us that this is **not** the worst case. Instead, there is increasing evidence that these harmful chemicals can play a role in miscarriages, male infertility, premature puberty in girls, obesity, and heart disease, to name a few of the correlations.

In summary we should consider ourselves lucky to have our tax-supported FDA watching our backs, including watching what we are putting on our backs in our daily shower! If there is no research showing benefit for these exposures, why take the risk?