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The Network's

mission is to promote the rational use of medication and essential drugs concept in Pakistan in order to optimize the usefulness of drugs and help bring equity in their access.

Bottled babies

It is common for mothers in Pakistan to buy infant formula and other artificial baby food products under the misconception that the contents of these attractively-packaged and expensive tins are better than their own milk and simple, home-made, fresh baby dishes. Millions of rupees are spent because of such wrong notions. Poor and illiterate mothers lovingly prepare 'milk' for their children without even understanding the directions on the packing. Families spend their hard-earned money on infant formulas while foregoing basic necessities of life.

A conservative estimate of the cost of feeding an infant artificial baby food is nearly Rs 1,500 per month. Our country imported powder milk and baby food worth \$48.9 million in 1995-96. Why the huge, unnecessary spendings and why the mistaken beliefs? It is widely known that unethical and aggressive marketing by manufacturers of artificial baby food products in connivance with medical staff impacts gullible mothers. This leads to the unjustified use of the artificial food products and, consequently, a decline in breastfeeding rates. The attendant risks of bottlefeeding — which increases four times the risk of dying due to diarrhea and 14 times due to acute respiratory infections — further bring profits to the medical profession and the pharmaceutical industry.

The dynamics of this negative symbiosis between industry and medical professionals is well-known, and has deep and pervasive implications for children and their parents. The ploy should be easily discernable to the government, which ought to counteract with a Protection of Breastfeeding and Young Child Nutrition Act.

The Network has conducted a countrywide survey to record milk formula manufacturers' compliance with the International Code for Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes. This has been done to build a case for the legislation of a national law on the issue. Our findings, now available in the report **Feeding Fiasco: Pushing Commercial Infant Foods in Pakistan**, provide compelling reasons for the government to accelerate the formulation of the Act, now on the anvil.

This issue contains a special pull-out centrespread that highlights some of the important aspects of our report **Feeding Fiasco**.



Viagra®: as sales rise, impotence goes down

NEW YORK: For much of his 35-year career, Dr Don Phillip Gibson, a general practitioner in Winfield, Kansas, has been able to spot a patient with an impotence problem seconds after he walked through his office door.

"I could tell by how they were squirming in their chairs what they were about to tell me," Dr Gibson said, "and I knew they had wrestled months, or even years, before coming to see me. The trouble was that there wasn't much you could do about it. I never had a patient I referred to a urologist come away happy with the treatment he received."

That may be changing. With the US Food and Drug Administration's approval [March 27] of Pfizer's Viagra®, the first pill to treat impotence, many of the 30 million American men who are believed to suffer from the ailment, Dr Gibson among them, will now be able to experience some quick and easy relief.

The introduction of Viagra® and a host of other more painful and invasive treatments for male

Viagra® is now available in Pakistan — on the black market. But, according to media reports, at Rs 1,200-1,800 each the pill is not for the faint-hearted. A recent report in The News says that "manufacturers of a 'miracle drug' are chasing the health minister with cartons full of 'samples'."

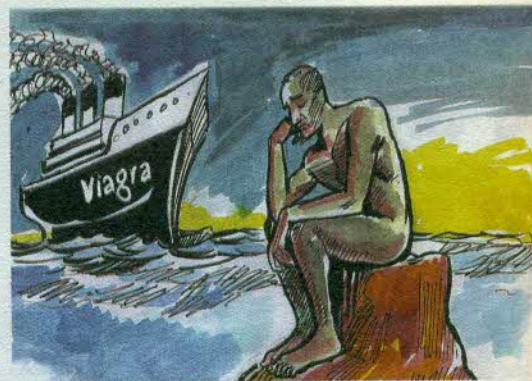
Reported side-effects of the drug include headaches, dizziness, and 'blue vision'. Doctors caution heart patients and those on nitrate therapy from taking the drug.

Viagra® has also been linked with heart attacks. As many as 16 people have reported to have died due to heart attacks after taking the drug, but the link has not been positively established.

erectile dysfunction, as it is now known is part of a new departure for the world's pharmaceutical companies. After spending much of their research budgets focusing on cures for fatal and chronic illnesses, they now see a vast new opportunity in offering a spate of drugs aimed at easing the various ailments and complaints of aging baby boomers.

"Pharmaceutical companies have discovered that some of the conditions associated with aging, impotence and incontinence for example, may not be life-threatening, but they can virtually destroy someone's quality of life," said David Saks, senior vice-president at Gruntal & Co., a brokerage.

This should add up to a boon for Pfizer. Some Wall Street analysts are predicting that worldwide sales of Viagra®, which will cost \$7



wholesale per pill, could eventually top \$4.5 billion, easily making it one of the world's best-selling drugs. Prozac, Eli Lilly's ubiquitous antidepressant, is expected to reach \$2.7 billion in worldwide sales this year, according to industry estimates.

David J. Morrow in International Herald Tribune

Phenolphthalein products withdrawn

All drugs containing phenolphthalein were withdrawn from several world markets recently. In Germany, the Federal Institute for Drugs and Medical Devices has recommended marketing authorization holders of phenolphthalein laxative products to withdraw their products from the market because of potential toxicological risks.

The US Food and Drug Administration has proposed to ban over-the-counter sale of products containing phenolphthalein.

In Italy the Ministry of Health has suspended the marketing authorization for laxatives containing phenolphthalein with immediate effect.

In December 1997, the European Union's Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products (CPMP) issued a position paper on the genotoxic and carcinogenic potential of phenolphthalein. The CPMP has concluded that "carcinogenicity and repeat dose genotoxicity studies of phenolphthalein in mice have identified a hazard with respect to carcinogenic and genotoxic activity." However, this has yet to be established in humans, says the Committee.

In Japan government health authorities have said that phenolphthalein-containing products have been voluntarily withdrawn by manufacturers.

WHO Drug Information, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1998

