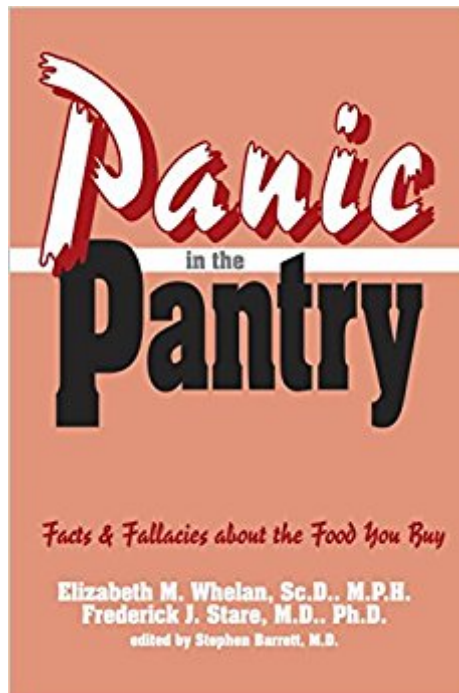




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Panic In The Pantry (Consumer Health Library)



Synopsis

Panic in the Pantry was written to help consumers become fully aware of the real facts behind news about the safety of our food supply. Whelan and Stare examine the power wielded by health food lobbyists who band together and exert political pressure to protect their profitable ventures. They discuss the concept of "relative risk" and why it should be used to place information about food additives and preservatives into proper perspective, as well as why the Delaney Clause - a law intended to protect us from cancer causing chemicals in our food - cannot fulfill the noble purpose for which it was drafted and therefore should be repealed. Also examined is the research behind the banning of cyclamates and the attacks on saccharin and aspartame that left many Americans wondering whether they are doomed to be chubby or develop cancer. A lengthy discussion of California's Proposition 65 provides insight into the chaos that can result when fearmongers are able to secure legislation based on panic about food supply. The authors also address the flight to "natural" products, which may lead to serious health problems as well as added consumer expense. The contemporary back-to-nature mania is rejected as a hoax perpetuated by opportunists intent on taking advantage of frightened and impressionable consumers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In its various editions, this book has always been a jumble of mixed messages. It is intended partly to dispel myths propounded by food faddists. The authors hammer away at unscientific views on

food additives, "natural" foods, over-the-top food supplement claims. This is not hard labor since the claims they attack are often ridiculous. However, it seems a bit odd that these "quackbusters" and "junk science" critics don't provide footnotes for their own assertions. They apparently fancy themselves such revered experts that readers are to take their declarations at face value. Or they are too lazy to provide documentation. These authors should know better. To a disturbing extent, the book reads like a legal polemic. There are countless references to the legal plights of those who they consider to be quacks. Often these legal issues have nothing whatever to do with the merits of the scientific issues. Do we really learn anything about the value of, say, chelation therapy, by being told that one proponent has been prosecuted for tax evasion? Because of these frequent asides, the book has a sleazy, even authoritarian tone. The authors, and editor Barrett, are known to favor relentless government action, both legal and regulatory, against people with whom they disagree. Barrett has even advocated changing the laws so that consumers can sue publishers who publish articles with (what Barrett considers) erroneous and harmful health advice. So much for freedom of the press. The authors give us clues on how to recognize a "health quack." One of these clues is that quacks "display credentials not recognized by responsible scientists or educators." This is said to be the insight of editor Barrett.

Evidently the first edition of 'Panic in the Pantry,' which was published in 1975, didn't have sufficient impact, since the new edition starts with a history of the 1989 Alar panic. A lot of people thought the Alar-in-apples scare demonstrated the dangers of pesticides in our food supply. What it really showed is that most people don't know beans about nutrition. Fortunately, according to Elizabeth Whelan and Frederick Stare, they don't have to, since America's food is not only the most abundant but the safest in the world. 'Panic' is really aimed not only at people who don't understand anything about nutrition, but whose education is so defective they are incapable of understanding anything about it. Therefore, unless they are willing to study hard, they will continue to have to take somebody else's word for it. Whelan, president of the American Council on Science and Health, and Stare, retired founder of Harvard University's Department of Nutrition, say you should take the word of scientists, like them. Of course, lots of habitues of the health food stores seem suspicious of scientists. They are right to be skeptical but are facing the wrong way. ACSH, for example, occasionally runs blind surveys of Healthfoodland (as Whelan and Stare call it) to find out what quality of advice is being given out. The results are appalling. In 1989, another group, the Consumer Health Education Council, called 41 Houston health food stores with a concocted story about a man with AIDS who was continuing to have sexual relations with his wife. The callers purported to seek

nutritional advice for the couple.

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