

John Adriani Banned From FDA by Pharmaceutical Industry: An Historical Vignette and Cartoon

David Broussard, MD, MBA, Amit Yajnik, MD

Department of Anesthesiology, Ochsner Clinic Foundation, New Orleans, LA

ABSTRACT

In 1969, Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Herbert Ley offered New Orleans anesthesiologist John Adriani, MD, the role of director of the Bureau of Medicine. Dr Adriani accepted the offer, but it was quickly withdrawn, in part based on pressure from the pharmaceutical industry. It opposed Dr Adriani's appointment because of his work promoting generic drugs. This episode was the subject of a 1969 cartoon in the *Hartford Times* by Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Ed Valtman.

Dr John Adriani came to New Orleans in 1941 to become Director of Anesthesiology at Charity Hospital. His career in New Orleans spanned more than 3 decades.¹ During this time, he was an internationally known educator, clinician, and author whose prolific writings are still relevant in the specialty today. A particular interest of Dr Adriani was pharmacology. He served for many years on the Council on Drugs of the American Medical Association and was appointed chairman in 1976.²

As a result of Dr Adriani's extensive knowledge of pharmacology, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Herbert Ley offered him the role of director of the Bureau of Medicine within the FDA in 1969; Dr Adriani accepted the offer. At age 61, he committed to resigning his professorships at Louisiana State University and Tulane to accept the post.

Address correspondence to
David Broussard, MD, MBA
Department of Anesthesiology
Ochsner Clinic Foundation
1514 Jefferson Highway
New Orleans, LA 70121
Tel: (504) 842-3755
Fax: (504) 842-2036
Email: dabroussard@ochsner.org

Key Words: Gaylord Nelson, generic, John Adriani, pharmaceutical

The offer was quickly withdrawn, however, allegedly as a result of pressures from the drug industry, members of whom were concerned about Dr Adriani's efforts to promote generic drugs. With pharmaceuticals considered a \$5 billion per year industry at the time, the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association had good reason to oppose the appointment. Dr Adriani had testified to the Monopoly Subcommittee of the US Senate that he supported regulations requiring that drugs be advertised and sold under generic rather than brand names. The chairman of the committee, Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin (incidentally, the founder of Earth Day), was quoted as saying, "It's quite obvious that the pharmaceutical industry has again demonstrated its great power in keeping a distinguished spokesman for sound medical practice out of an important position."³

Rumors circulated that President Nixon himself had intervened. White House sources were later quoted as saying that President Nixon had nothing to do with the decision. Senator Russell Long of Louisiana was also on the Monopoly Subcommittee chaired by Nelson. "The methods used by major drug manufacturers to extract outrageously high prices from the public will be under successful challenge in the years ahead regardless of whom the President names to hold this position," Senator Long said.³ A Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) spokesperson denied that drug industry pressure was involved in the decision. The official story is that Commissioner Ley jumped the gun and did not get HEW Secretary Robert Finch's approval for the appointment before telling Adriani about it.³

The Adriani situation was the subject of a 1969 cartoon in the *Hartford Times* by cartoonist Ed Valtman (Figure). The cartoon depicts Dr Adriani approaching the FDA building that is blocked by a large guard wearing a sash labeled "Drug Industry." As Dr Adriani attempts to gain access to the building, he utters "Generic," to which the guard responds, "Sorry—wrong password!"

Dr Adriani kept his sense of humor on the episode. "I never imagined the drug companies would let me get anywhere close to real decision making power in Washington," he said.⁴



Printed with permission of the Edward Valtman Estate.

REFERENCES

1. Betcher AM. Historical development of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc. In: Volpitto PP, Vandam LD, eds. *The Genesis of Contemporary American Anesthesiology*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas; 1982:134.
2. Dr. John Adriani, 80, dies in New Orleans. *The New York Times*. June 17, 1988:7.
3. The Adriani affair. *Newsweek*. September 8, 1969:55.
4. The very outspoken Dr. Adriani. *The States-Item*. January 19, 1976:B1.

This article meets the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education competency for Medical Knowledge.