

Opinion

OP-ED: Anti-Obesity Medicines Are Not All Created Equally

By Colonel Jeffrey D. Glover &
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This is the reality of an unregulated black market. People think they are injecting medicine into their bodies that will improve their health, but they could be injecting poison—or nothing at all.

The new FDA-approved weight loss medicines have changed the game for people with obesity, offering millions of Americans a chance to transform their health, prevent disease, and live longer lives. But as demand for these treatments soars, an illegal industry is growing alongside it. Criminal networks, counterfeiters, and rogue compounding pharmacies are taking advantage of patients’ needs, flooding the market with fake, unsafe, and untested knockoffs. In December 2023, the FDA seized thousands of counterfeit injection pens within the U.S. drug supply chain. A Tennessee woman’s home was also raided by police, where officers found more than 300 vials of counterfeit weight loss drugs—semaglutide and tripeptide—that she had been supplying to med spa clinics. After testing, one of the vials contained nothing but water. This is the reality of an unregulated black market. People

think they are injecting medicine into their bodies that will improve their health, but they could be injecting poison—or nothing at all.

For counterfeiters and other profiteers, the market is ripe for exploitation — high patient demand and a rising obesity epidemic create the perfect conditions for their illegal trade to thrive. The result? A knock-off weight-loss drug market populated with med spas, online “telehealth” sellers, and unauthorized compounding pharmacies pushing dangerous counter-

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feit or untested compounded medications. The Black community is especially vulnerable given its higher prevalence of obesity. In 2023, non-Hispanic Black or African American adults were 30% more likely to be obese than non-Hispanic white adults, with 43 percent of non-Hispanic Black adults over the age of 18 classified as obese. As the Executive Director of



Weight loss pills are harmful to health.Diet pill and lose weight (Photo Credit By Nalin Prutimongkol)

the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), I oversee an organization whose mission is to protect our communities from harm. Law enforcement officers are already seeing the rise of counterfeit weight loss drugs spread through our communities. Just as with illicit street drugs, enforcing the law is critical to get these dangerous products off the market. But equally critical is to stem consumer demand.

The Trump administration has an opportunity to help curb this rising demand. Currently, there is a proposed rule at the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare (CMS) rule that would provide coverage for FDA-approved weight loss drugs, thereby significantly increasing access to

these innovative medicines. Unlike other chronic diseases, obesity treatments have been excluded from Medicare coverage. The result has been limited access to authentic medicines, creating a high demand for knock-off versions. While law enforcement must do its part to rein in bad actors, the new administration can help by finalizing the CMS proposed rule. Providing greater access to safe and effective medicines would go. A long way to put illicit suppliers on notice and out of business. No one should be exposed to the risks that come with untested, unregulated injectable medicines and I am confident President Trump will make the right decisions to protect American public health.

They Cannot Rob Us of Our History and Our Place in America’s Story

My grandfather’s first cousin was Lieutenant Colonel Howard Lee Baugh. Cousin Howard was part of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the first unit of the Tuskegee Airmen. This month marks the 84th anniversary of the activation of the Squadron at Chanute Field in Rantoul, Illinois, about 120 miles southwest of Chicago.

A few years ago, I sat with my friend Norman Lear, the late TV legend behind shows like All in the Family and The Jeffersons that became important American cultural staples. Norman and I figured out that my cousin Howard was one of the Tuskegee Airmen who escorted Norman on some of his bombing missions during World War II. (In addition to creating those social consciousness-raising shows and founding People For the American Way, Norman’s patriotic resume also included 52 bomber missions in America’s fight against global fascism.)

It was an amazing connection to make to this piece of my own proud piece of family history. A lifesized bronze statue of Lt. Col. Baugh stands in permanent tribute to him and the other Tuskegee Airmen in the Black History Mu-

seum in Richmond, Virginia.

This history is personal to me because of the family connection to the Airmen – Lt. Col. Baugh was actually one of two of my grandfather’s cousins who were Tuskegee Airmen – but this is history that is important to countless Black Americans. It is also history the Trump administration seemingly wants to erase from existence.

Beyond the federal government no longer recognizing celebrations such as Black History Month and Women’s History Month, the Pentagon is removing every program, mention, image, or individual they say is associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. The Trump administration already fired Air Force General CQ Brown, Jr. – another history-making Black fighter pilot like my cousin Lt. Col. Baugh – as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Admiral Lisa Franchetti, the Navy’s first female chief.

Now, it was reported last week that more than 26,000 (so far) photographs or online posts have been flagged for deletion in a Pentagon database because they apparently arouse Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth’s suspicion of



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DEI. Among them: photos of the Tuskegee Airmen.

To give you an idea of the precision of this white-washing frenzy, also targeted on the list are images captioned with or including the word “gay.” And, as of last week, that included references to the Enola Gay, the B-29 bomber that dropped the atomic bomb over Hiroshima, and photographs of people whose last name is Gay. And it would not be Women’s History Month under the new Trump administration without targeting references to pathbreaking women among the various war heroes and historic military firsts – women like Air Force Colonel Jeannie Leavitt, the country’s first female fighter pilot, and Private First Class Christina Fuentes Montenegro, one of the first three women to graduate from the Marine Corps’ Infantry Training Battalion. Also listed in the database was an image of Private First

Class Harold Gonsalves, who was posthumously presented the Medal of Honor for military valor during World War II and happened to be Mexican-American.

In his perverse view of DEI, Secretary Hegseth thinks removing DEI initiatives means erasing history. And he says “DEI is dead” in the US military because it puts certain groups ahead of others and erodes cohesion and camaraderie among the ranks. But the truth is the opposite. It is not only just and moral that we recognize the contributions of people from marginalized groups (especially when they are military heroes who opened up doors for future generations). It is unifying.

We are all Americans. But some of us have just had our communities’ histories and contributions ignored, and even suppressed. Protecting every community’s, every family’s place in the American story is vital. It is vital for the children who otherwise would not see people they identify with in our history books. And it is vital for America to be what Frederick Douglass knew we could be: “the perfect national illustration of the unity and dignity of the human family.”