

A Lesson From Gerald Levert's Death

by Qaraandin



*“With no information, you will be killed;
With bad information, you will kill yourself;
With good information, you will live forever.”*

~Spartacus R

We live in a society where we operate as if living is a condition that needs to be treated with some form of medication. We can buy drugs to help us go to the bathroom; drugs to keep us from going to the bathroom; drugs to wake us up; drugs to put us to sleep; drugs to encourage us to eat more; drugs to help us eat less; drugs to perk us up; drugs to calm us down. It doesn't matter what we think the problem is – or even if there is no problem – there is a drug.

We have become over-medicated with prescription drugs and self-medicated with over-the-counter drugs. With so many drugs available to us over-the-counter and by prescription we often mix drugs without realizing that doing so can have harmful, and sometimes fatal, results.

Very few of us read the warnings that come with our prescriptions. Almost no one reads the warnings that are on the packages of the drugs we buy over-the-counter. When the doctor has prescribed something for a condition, most of us never think of how our bodies will react when we add something we picked up off the shelf to the mix. It never occurs to us that just one more dose of one more drug could be more than our body can handle.

Many Black folk who are of the “Soul” generation – who were teen-agers and young adults in the 60s – find that our generation of folk are not living as long and/or as well as the generations of our parents and grandparents. We look around ourselves and see that our peers are dropping like flies and our parents are still going strong. Or, as in the case of someone I know, we have a sibling in a nursing home, we have several conditions that requires a lot of attention, and our parents are fine and live on their own.

We are plagued with high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer and other conditions that we are assured are “hereditary” and our parents have a clean bill of health. In many of the cases where our parents and grandparents develop dis-ease, the initial on-set of the condition occurred at a much older age for them than it occurred for us.

One of the things that I have noticed is that folk of our parents' and grandparents' generations are more likely to be able to handle life's adventures without going into a state of dis-stress, which as we know is the number one cause of dis-ease. When they develop a dis-ease condition, they tend to be more careful in their use of drugs – prescribed and over-the-counter. They are more likely to try a home remedy first.

When Gerald Levert died at the age of 40, many Black folk were very surprised. We are usually surprised when such an extremely young person dies. Somewhere in our heads we have it that anyone who dies and is less than about 90 died young.

A few months after his death we learn that he died from acute intoxication – the result of a lethal drug mix.

According to news reports, the drugs that were found in his bloodstream included the prescription pain relievers Vicodin, Percocet, and Darvocet; the anxiety medication Xanax; and two unnamed over-the-counter antihistamines.

In December 2006, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed putting labels on over-the-counter pain relievers that contain acetaminophen to warn of the potential of stomach bleeding and liver damage. This came 30 years after the FDA's Advisory Review Panel recommended in 1977 that products containing acetaminophen carry warnings such as, “Do not exceed recommended dosage because severe liver damage may occur.”

In 2002, the Health Research Group testified to the FDA's Nonprescription Drugs Advisory Committee that each year more than 26,000 folk wind up in hospital and 458 die because of acetaminophen overdoses.

That may help keep us from doing damage to our selves when we buy over-the-counter drugs, but what about the drugs that are prescribed for us by doctors?

Vicodin, Percocet, and Darvocet are all prescription drugs. And each one contains acetaminophen.

The information that is provided for Vicodin users mentions the following first in a list called “What is the most important information I should know about Vicodin?” “Do not take Vicodin with alcohol, other narcotic pain medications, sedatives, tranquilizers, muscle relaxers, or other medicines that can make you sleepy or slow your breathing. Dangerous side effects may result.”

Answers to the question “What is the most important information I should know about Percocet?” include “...avoid sleeping pills, tranquilizers, sedatives, and antihistamines except under the supervision of your doctor. These medications also may cause dangerous sedation.”

One of the warnings that we get from information about Darvocet is, “Do not take other over-the-counter and prescription products that contain acetaminophen. Too much acetaminophen could be dangerous. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter preparations.”

The information that is provided for each one of those drugs warns, “Watch the acetaminophen content of other over-the-counter and prescription products while taking this medication. Do not take more than a total of 4 grams (4000 mg) of acetaminophen per day.”

I do not know the total dosage of acetaminophen that was in the Vicodin, Percocet, and Darvocet cocktail. Maybe the 3 drugs did have a total of less than 4 grams of acetaminophen per day and it was the two over-the-counter antihistamines that did Gerald Levert in.

I do know this...here is another case that proves that we cannot just present our bodies to someone else and trust that the care they give will cure us.