Characteristics and challenges in using dietary supplement databases derived from label information

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In the USA, dietary supplements are regulated as foods and contain vitamins, minerals, botanicals and other ingredients. Two types of supplement databases exist in the USA. Databases of small, analytically-derived values of representative samples of products sold on the market, and large databases of values declared on product labels (label-derived). Each has its own unique challenges. Because chemical analyses of representative national samples of products are expensive, and methods for many botanical ingredients are not available, analytically-derived databases are usually limited to nutrients provided in popular supplements, such as multivitamin- mineral supplements, omega 3 fatty acids and calcium-vitamin D supplements. Databases that use values derived from product labels, assume these values are valid and reflect product contents. The Dietary Supplement Label Database (DSLD) from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is free and contains information taken from over 85,000 labels of products marketed in the USA. Information presented on product labels must conform to US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)'s labeling regulations. The 2016 regulations revised the Daily Values (DV) and units for expressing nutrients on product labels, as well as the definitions for sugar and dietary fiber. The regulations will not affect how information on botanicals and other non- nutrients appear on labels. The regulations will continue to give manufacturers considerable flexibility in declaring these ingredients. For example, when botanicals are labeled as propriety blends the level of individual ingredients within the blend need not be declared. This presentation will discuss on how the 2016 FDA labeling regulations will affect product labels and data in label-derived databases, demonstrate the characteristics and challenges of working with label-derived data, and challenges with conducting research using label-derived data available in the DSLD.

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