

BUSINESS

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HEALTHCARE | FROM THE FRONT PAGE

FIU research leads to a Niagra probe

• LETTER, FROM 1C

ingredient in Viagra.

"It's not a deadly compound, but, in the right conditions, it can be," said Alberto J. Sabucedo, a chemistry professor who started investigating the supplements more than a year ago.

The problem, as anyone who has watched a Viagra television commercial knows, is that the pill is dangerous for those who take nitrates for heart conditions.

"People don't know what they're really taking with

these things," Sabucedo said in a telephone interview Tuesday. "Who knows how many deaths are out there?"

Actra-RX is imported from China by Body Basics of Los Angeles. At 3 p.m. California time Tuesday, a person who answered the phone said that the office was closed for the day and that no one could answer questions. Health Scout, a trade publication, quoted a Body Basics executive this year as saying the product did not contain sildenafil.

Sabucedo, the FIU chemist,

said he became interested in September of 2003 when Mauricio A. Gutierrez, a Chilean graduate student in communications, brought him a bottle of pills called Niagra Actra-R that he said he had bought at a local store after reading an ad in The Herald.

Gutierrez wanted to know what the pills contained. Sabucedo and his associates tested them, then purchased another set, these called Actra-R, directly from the company over the Internet.

The pills contained about 55 milligrams of sildenafil —

about the amount found in a 50mg Viagra tablet.

Sabucedo said he informed the FDA in September 2003. In February, the research team detailed its findings in a letter, titled *Sex, Lies and Niagra*, published in The Journal of the American Medical Association.

Tuesday, in a press release, the FDA cited the letter and instructed field personnel to stop importation of the supplements, believed to come from China.

"I guess bureaucracies move slowly," Sabucedo said.

HEALTHCARE

'Sex, lies' lead to FDA probe

■ An FIU research team that wrote a prestigious medical journal a letter titled 'Sex, Lies and Niagra' may well have saved lives, according to an FDA warning to men.

BY JOHN DORSCHNER
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Based on the work of a Florida International University research team, the Food and Drug Administration issued on Tuesday a warning that men shouldn't use two supposedly natural "dietary supplements" intended to treat erectile dysfunction.

The FIU researchers had found that two nonprescription remedies, Actra-RX, formerly known as Niagra, and Yilishben, contained large amounts of sildenafil, the active

• TURN TO LETTER, 4C