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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Labeling Coca Extract: After Ridding Red-eye, the Bottle Sheds Its Own Reds



When cocaine was discovered to be a topical anesthetic for the eye, physicians learned that this local anesthetic “got the red out” by vasoconstricting inflamed vessels in bloodshot eyes. Ironically, clinicians today recognize cocaine addicts by the latter’s reddened eyes, which suffer from not only “rebound redness” but also hyperdynamic cardiovascular states. The 4 fluid ounce bottle of coca extract (*above*) was labeled with red ink by Parke, Davis & Company. Unfortunately, reds as a color rank lowest in visible light energy. So, for us to see the red letters, they must absorb more energetic non-red visible light (and ultraviolet) rays, all of which degrade the molecular bonds of red inks. Consequently, museums that display such bottles actually risk having red labels bleach entirely white in the ambient light. *Caveat curator!* (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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