

HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY: A THEORY RUN AMOK

The *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) called it a major landmark in medical research. It was also a huge piece of medical humble pie. In July 2002, a stunning announcement rocked the medical community: the Women's Health Initiative Study of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) was terminated after showing more harm to women than benefit, including increased risk for breast cancer, heart disease, strokes and blood clots.

In the June 25, 2003 issue of JAMA, the landmark study was revisited in two new studies confirming the original results:

Relatively short—term combined estrogen plus progestin use increases incident breast cancers (sic), which are diagnosed at a more advanced stage compared with placebo use, and also substantially increases the percentage of women with abnormal mammograms. These results suggest estrogen plus progestin may stimulate breast cancer growth and hinder breast cancer diagnosis.

The second study concurred:

These data suggest that use of CHRT (Combined Hormone Replacement Therapy) is associated with an increased risk of breast cancer, particularly invasive lobular tumors, whether the progestin component was taken in a sequential or in a continuous manner.

An editorial in the June 25th JAMA concluded: "...alternation of a woman's basic hormone physiology over decades in the interest of long-term disease prevention is fraught with hazard."

It Took 60 Years to Discover This?

How could modern science delude itself and millions of women for six long decades? And how did the whole idea of hormone replacement evolve?

Pharmaceutical companies started with suggestion rather than science. Beginning in 1942, women were told: Estrogen Replacement Therapy will keep you young, help you keep your husband and protect you from heart disease and osteoporosis.

An immense tapestry of bad science was woven by the original "spin doctors" starting with this false premise— that instead of being a natural, God-given process of life, menopause was a disease. And chemically derived hormone substitutes held the solution.

Women were presented theory as if it were proven fact as a medical juggernaut of pharmaceutical giants and the medical industry rolled forth.

Pharmaceutical giant Wyeth Ayerst, the maker of synthetic hormones, found a willing gynecologist named Robert A. Wilson and set him up with positive "studies" (contracted and paid for by Wyeth) and the means to write a book called *Feminine Forever*, published in 1966. (Even Dr. Wilson's Fifth Avenue office was a gift from Wyeth.)

Wilson's words are difficult to read in 2003. Calling them "sexist" and "ageist" doesn't do justice to his tone. Dr. Wilson's son, Ronald, came to abhor his father's legacy writing, "Thanks to my late father, a drug made from animal waste is the most widely prescribed drug in the world today."

Feminine Forever opens with the story of a man asking Dr. Wilson to prescribe estrogen for his wife saying, "She's driving me nuts. She won't fix meals. She picks at me all the time." The man dramatically pulls a gun from his pocket and says, "If you don't cure her, I'll kill her." Dr. Wilson then pats himself on the back for being the savior of this woman by writing: "I have often been haunted by the thought that except for the tiny stream of estrogen ... this woman might have died a violent death at the hands of her own husband."

Dr. Wilson wrote that menopause is a "living decay," often destroying not only a woman's health but her character as well. He claimed that during menopause women fall into a "vapid cow-like" state. Estrogen can transform this "dull cow" into a younger-looking and more supple woman. "The unpalatable truth must be faced that all post-menopausal women are castrates. A man remains a man until the very end. The situation with a woman is very different," his book states.

Dr. Wilson continued with a broad, unproven statement about women on estrogen replacement therapy: "Breasts and genital organs will not shrivel. Such women will be more pleasant to live with and not become dull and unattractive."

In Dr. John Lee's book, *What Your Doctor May Not Tell You about Menopause*, he tells how Wyeth Ayerst, the first maker of a conjugated estrogen (Premarin), continued to encourage Wilson's publicity efforts and support for estrogen replacement therapy. The Wilson Foundation was set up for the sole purpose of promoting the use of estrogen drugs. The pharmaceutical industry generously contributed over \$1.3 million to the foundation.

Dr. Wilson's distasteful rhetoric was toned down a notch as time went by. A 1970s ad from Wyeth-Ayerst, read, "Almost

any tranquilizer might calm her down, but estrogen is what she really needs.”

A timeline in a recent *US News and World Report* showed how big medicine jumped on the estrogen bandwagon. A 1959 JAMA article touted the benefits of prolonged estrogen therapy. A 25-year study of 113 women showed estrogen protects bones and relieves menopausal symptoms. The authors add: “Fear that breast and cervical cancer may result from this therapy appears to be unfounded.”

The First Cloud on the Horizon

But some legitimate science began raining on the estrogen parade.

In 1975 the pharmaceuticals began backpedaling furiously because the *New England Journal of Medicine* printed two studies showing that post-menopausal estrogen use increased endometrial cancer risk four to 14 times.

“Unopposed” estrogen was suddenly not good for women. Quickly, synthetic progesterone (Progestin) was added to this “wonder” drug and the name of the treatment Estrogen Replacement Therapy (ERT) was changed to Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). “Don’t worry, women,” the message seemed to say, “we’ve fixed the problem. Don’t worry your pretty little heads.”

Some nine million postmenopausal women who were taking Premarin (Wyeth made as much as \$2 billion a year from Premarin sales) relaxed and worried no more.

Their real worry was yet in the future.

Premarin, Prempro, PremPac: What Exactly Does the “P” Stand For?

You have to hand it to the pharmaceuticals—they weren’t subtle. The answer to the above question is “pee.” Horse urine. Read the bold letters: **Pregnant Mares’ Urine**. The *Physician’s Desk Reference* reports that Premarin is made from substances “obtained exclusively from natural sources.” Yes, natural to a horse, but not to a woman. And how many of the millions of American women had the vaguest clue they were ingesting horse urine?

The conjugated equine (horse) estrogens found in the Prem formulas contain estrone, an estrogen also found in the human female. But the equine estrogens, equilin and equilenin, are foreign to the human female and can tax the liver and cause liver changes. The human female does not have the enzymes and other co-factors to process these horse estrogens.

Do an Internet search on Premarin and learn the very ugly story of how mares are kept in inhumane conditions and those foals born on factory farms are killed. What price have American women been paying in animal cruelty alone?

Science Reluctantly Admits the Truth About HRT

In July of 2002 came the stunning announcement of the halting of a huge HRT study. It was halted because of danger to the participants. The bombshell announcement was that the 16,000- woman, federally funded Women's Health Initiative study found that women who were taking HRT had a greater risk of:

- Breast cancer
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Blood clots

These results confirmed the American Heart Association position that postmenopausal women should not take HRT to lower their risk for heart disease.

The summer of 2003 brought even more bad news for HRT. It was discovered that older women taking combined estrogen/progestin therapy had twice the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and other dementias as women taking a placebo (sugar pill).

Yet another study revealed that Premarin was linked to an elevated risk of ovarian cancer. Women on HRT also were more likely to suffer from gallstones.

You may yet read of new studies showing liver damage also resulting from HRT. In *Dr. Susan Love's Hormone Book*, she warned, "Premarin has more of an effect on the liver than non-horse estrogens do. There may be something else in the horse urine besides estrogen that causes some of this additional effect."

A University of Miami School of Medicine study states that; "Estrogens can inhibit the metabolism of cyclosporine, resulting in increased cyclosporine blood levels. These increased blood levels can result in kidney and/or liver damage ..."

The Cost of Synthetic Instead of Natural

Perhaps the saddest of all truths to finally emerge from this tapestry of marketing spin is that untold numbers of women, including Dr. Robert A. Wilson's wife, paid a great price for their use of estrogen. After two bouts of breast cancer and a mastectomy, the estrogen doctor's wife died of cancer in 1988.

Son Ronald Wilson believes that Wyeth urged Dr. Wilson to keep her condition quiet. "If word ever got out that Dr. Wilson's wife had cancer, there goes the drug." Ronald said.

When so many natural compounds exist that can alleviate menopausal symptoms, why the rush to synthetic? It's simple. You can't patent nature. Profits are ultimately more important than people.

That sounds cold, but perhaps one needs to think like a pharmaceutical president does.

A former president of Parke-Davis, Harry Loynd, had an interesting motto: "Pills are to sell, not to take." Loynd thought physicians to be extremely gullible. Perhaps he should have included the public in that assessment as well when he claimed, "If we put horse manure in a capsule, we could sell it to 95 percent of these doctors."

A Lesson Still Not Learned?

Researchers are seeking to fill the void left by the increasingly shunned synthetic hormones. But they will continue to look at what works in nature and synthesize it in the laboratory. Will synthetic phytoestrogens be a solution for the next six decades?

Natural compounds exist to ease women through the natural and normal process of menopause. Perhaps the greatest lesson of all is that women have the power to choose natural solutions to the discomforts associated with this life change.

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