The Cancer Causing Facts about “Hormone Pills” and Why Bio-Identical Hormone Therapies (BHRT) are a Safe Alternative

Simply put...like a key into a lock, the human body does not recognize the molecular structure of synthetically modified hormone drugs. Synthetic hormones manufactured by pharmaceutical companies, such as Premarin or Prempro, have a slightly different molecular structure than those produced within the body. The body does not recognize these patented drugs and, as a result, they set off a chain reaction of side effects at the cellular level. Sometimes these side effects are uncomfortable like weight gain, bloating and headaches; sometimes they are lethal such as an increased risk in breast or uterine cancer, heart attacks, stroke and Alzheimer’s disease.

For decades, there has been a raging debate within the medical community regarding the potential side effects associated with synthetic hormone replacement therapies (HRT) versus the safety and efficacy of bio-identical, or human-identical, hormone therapies (BHRT). The controversy continues even while the evidence continues to mount. In 2002, the Women’s Health Initiative (WHI) Research Study funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) was halted due to the clinical outcomes linking synthetic HRT with increased rates of breast and uterine cancer, heart attacks, stroke and Alzheimer’s disease. Since 2002 there have been multiple studies that have substantiated the potentially carcinogenic properties of synthetic hormones. Most recently, in July of 2005, the United Nation’s cancer research agency reclassified synthetic hormone therapies from “possibly carcinogenic” to “carcinogenic.”

Why, with this much evidence as to the carcinogenic properties of synthetic HRT, are so many women still taking them? Better question: Why are their doctors still prescribing them?

“Physicians and the women they treat for menopausal symptoms have the right and deserve to know the truth,” says Dr. C.W. Randolph, Jr., an internationally known authority on natural medicine and women’s health concerns. “As a trained pharmacist and Board Certified gynecologist, I am appalled that synthetic HRT remains the treatment of choice for so many physicians who treat women with menopausal symptoms. Over the last decade, I have safely treated tens of thousands of patients with BHRT. My patients neither have to suffer from menopausal symptoms nor worry about side effects.”

“The problem,” says Dr. Randolph “is that most physicians are ignorant about BHRT. We were not taught about bio-identical hormones in medical school. As for myself, I have had to take the initiative to educate myself. I have drawn on my training as a pharmacist, searched out current research on BHRT and attended CME programs on the topic of BHRT. The best teachers I have had on this topic have actually been my patients. They get better; they don’t get sick.”

When asked why he thinks synthetic HRT continues to be so popular despite the scary reports of side effects, Dr. Randolph responded: “The fact is that big pharmaceutical...
companies have big budgets and large sales forces to market to physicians. They have a lot vested in these drugs and, until they are taken off the market, you can bet that they will still be out there sponsoring educational forums, knocking on doctors’ doors and leaving samples in order to keep selling synthetic HRT. Credible or questionable, the dollars the pharmaceutical companies spend gets them the ear of the physician.”

Dr. Randolph, who is both a trained pharmacist and practicing gynecologist, cites the following facts to support his position that no physician should ever prescribe synthetic HRT:

- In 2001, representatives from the National Cancer Institute and the NIH voted 8-1 to add synthetic estrogen to the nation’s list of cancer-causing agents.
- The WHI study was abruptly halted in July 2002. The initial findings showed that women taking synthetic combination HRT (e.g. Prempro) had an increased risk of heart disease, breast cancer, stroke and blood clots.
- In May 2003, additional findings were released indicating that women over 65 who were taking synthetic combination HRT (e.g. Prempro) had a heightened risk of dementia, or Alzheimer’s disease.
- In June 2003, the Journal of the American Medical Association published another study that was a closer analysis of the WHI findings on the correlation between Prempro and breast cancer. The new research affirmed the breast cancer problem, finding a 26% increase in the risk of breast cancer for women taking the synthetic HRT formulation.
- In the same time frame, a study appeared in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute in which Swedish researchers reported that women using synthetic estrogen replacement therapy had a 43% increased risk of ovarian cancer.
- The study went on to report that those women on a combination of synthetic estrogen and progestin had a 54% increased risk of ovarian cancer.
- In January 2003, the FDA required that the highest level of warning information in labeling be included with every prescription of synthetic estrogen or estrogen-progestin HRT. The label highlights the increased risks for heart disease, strokes and breast cancer.
- July 2005: The United Nations moves synthetic HRT from the classification of “possibly carcinogenic” to “carcinogenic.”

Dr. Randolph offers the following scientific explanation:

“Synthetic hormones manufactured by pharmaceutical companies, such as Premarin or Prempro, have a slightly different molecular structure than those produced within the body. The body does not recognize these patented drugs and, as a result, they set off a chain reaction of side effects at the cellular level. Sometimes these side effects are uncomfortable like weight gain, bloating and headaches; sometimes they are lethal such as an increased risk in breast or uterine cancer, heart attacks, stroke, and Alzheimer’s disease.

“In contrast, bio-identical hormones are formulated in a compounding pharmacy to have exactly the same molecular structure as the hormones produced within the human body. The body recognizes these hormones. They are keys that fit exactly into the body’s hormone receptor locks. Volumes of medical research supports the fact that when bio-identical progesterone and bio-identical estrogen are administered in physiologic doses (e.g. in dosages that re-establish the body’s optimal hormonal ratio of estrogen to progesterone) the bio-identical progesterone actually has cancer protective effects.”

Dr. Randolph also points out that misuse of terminology creates more confusion. “I hear a lot of so-called medical experts on television and on radio programs using the terms ‘progesterone’ and ‘progestin’ interchangeably. Progesterone has the molecular structure of the hormone produced within the body. Progestin is a synthetic version with a different molecular structure. To make a point, physicians give progesterone to pregnant women to help support the pregnancy. If a doctor were to give a pregnant woman progestin, she would be put at risk of losing the baby and the baby would be at risk for gestational abnormalities. Most likely, the doctor would be sued for malpractice. Obviously, bio-identical progesterone and synthetic progestin are very different substances.”

It really comes down to education vs. ignorance and business dollars vs. patient advocacy. Dr. Randolph encourages physicians to examine the data and begin to educate themselves on BHRT. “Even if the medical community continues to lag behind, the good news is that the female consumer is looking for safe alternatives because she doesn’t want to suffer through the menopausal years. Smart, informed and demanding women are finding their voice and they are asking their doctors to prescribe BHRT. If he or she won’t, many patients are walking out their doctor’s door and looking for a physician who will,” said Dr. Randolph. “One way or another, I believe that in a few years BHRT will be recognized as the safe and effective treatment of choice for hormonal imbalance and menopausal symptoms. I look forward to that day.”

Dr. Randolph’s web site: www.HormoneWell.com
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