



Hormone Replacement Therapies: Real Medical Science, *Not* Entertainment Medicine

As a board-certified gynecologist who has specialized in bioidentical hormone replacement therapies (BHRT) and successfully treated thousands of women and men for more than a decade, I had mixed feelings reading your June 8th article discussing Oprah's recent television programs on this topic, e.g. Live Your Best Life Ever! My first reaction was: "Well, at least someone is getting the word out about the safety and efficacy of BHRT. And who better to raise the noise level than the celebrity voices of Oprah, Robin McGraw and the cast of 'The Doctors?' Kudos to them."

My second reaction was – and is: "Why should the discussion of such a critical and widespread health concern be led by celebrities? If there is a debate about choices for hormone replacement – and one is certainly raging now - shouldn't the average American woman have access to the leading medical experts on both sides of this issue?" Choices regarding hormone replacement can be a life or death decision. To make informed decisions, women need solid, scientific facts, medical research and clinical studies – along with honest and open debate.

Let's start with the facts. Fact #1: Menopausal symptoms –such as hot flashes, night sweats, insomnia, weight gain, low libido, memory loss or brain fog, are all prevalent and growing issues. According to a 2000 U.S. Census Bureau report, there are an estimated 45.6 million menopausal women in the United States with 39.1 million women over the age of 51.¹ This means that today's American woman is likely to spend one third of her life in a menopausal state. These "baby boomer females" are not interested in suffering through "The Change" only to become increasingly fat, sexless and senile. They are demanding that the medical community come up with options for treatment.

Fact #2: Multiple medical studies have linked traditionally prescribed synthetic hormone replacement therapies, such as the still-popularly prescribed Premarin and Prempro, to significant and sometimes lethal health risks. Prior to the 2002 release of the output of the National Institute of Health's (NIH) Women's Health Initiative (WHI) study linking synthetic hormones to an increased risk of breast and uterine cancers, heart attack, stroke, blood clotting and Alzheimer's disease, sales of the Premarin family of products were a \$2.2 billion industry.² Not surprisingly, once women and their physicians learned of the health risks associated with these products, sales plummeted to just over \$1 billion by 2006. Hopefully, more recent studies linking these dangerous synthetic hormones to an increased risk of death from lung cancer and shrinkage of brain tissue will cause market penetration to fall even further.^{3,4}

Fact #3: Multiple medical studies published in this country and internationally validate the safety and efficacy of bioidentical hormone replacement therapies. Why is BHRT not more widely recognized as the menopausal treatment of choice? It is a matter of money and marketing.

Unlike pharmaceutical companies with large sales forces, when a study about BHRT is published by an academic medical research center (such as Joel Hargrove, M.D.'s research at Vanderbilt University Medical School, Abraham Morgentaler, M.D. at Harvard Medical School, Helene Leonetti, M.D. at St.



Luke's Hospital, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania or Kenna Stephenson, M.D. at University of Texas) there is no sales force waiting to take that study to physicians' offices. Doctors –like myself –who have developed an expertise in bioidentical hormones have had to seek out education and cull through the science and research mostly on our own. When marketing gets ahead of medical science, lives can be put at risk.

Rather than interview celebrities about their personal experiences, wouldn't the general public be better served if publications like *Newsweek* interviewed the top medical experts on both sides of this issue and compared the scientific data? Even better, why not raise your voice – along with your millions of possibly hot and irritated menopausal readers– to demand that the NIH come to the table again, this time funding a head-to-head clinical study comparing synthetic hormones to bioidentical hormones?

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References:

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