Buyers Beware of The Tamoxifen Hype
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HEALING

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The newest breast-cancer treatment comes with a distressing array of side effects

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In May 14, 1998, the medical journal Lancet published a glowing report of the 15-year study of the use of tamoxifen (sold as Nolvadex). The media quickly took advantage of this study and announced that 20,000 lives a year could be saved from breast cancer by five years of treatment ("protocol use") with tamoxifen. The statistic was derived from 55 randomized trials involving over 37,000 women during the fifteen-year study. Unfortunately, the claims and projections are not warranted by the statistical analysis of the data.

The study did show that for those taking tamoxifen after surgery for a period of five years there was substantial reduction in recurrence of breast cancer and an improvement in the ten-year survival rate. It was calculated that one in six women could be eliminated from relapse and one in twelve from dying. Even young, premenopausal women and those over fifty showed substantial benefit from the five years of treatments. Remarkably, there was benefit to those who had

metastatic (cancerous) nodes. There was also evidence that the protocol use of tamoxifen not only reduced the recurrent tumors (by 42%) but also the risk of new breast cancers (by 47%).

The public is not aware that many of the doctors who participated in the report are very active in the promotion of tamoxifen. There are those in the media as well as practicing physicians who are making glowing claims and suggesting that this is a simple and effective therapy that cannot only prevent recurrence but also prevent new tumor growth. They suggest that it should be accorded the "treatment of choice" label.

There has been very little, if any, discussion of tamoxifen's side effects and carcinogenicity. That is the reason for this month's column. There is a predilection of this drug to produce cancer of the uterus lining and fatal blood clots in the lung. Tamoxifen is known to produce liver cancer in rats, 43% of whom developed the disease after just six months.

The National Cancer Prevention trial of tamoxifen involved 13,000 women, half of whom received an inert placebo. The study was to go on for five years; however, it was cut short by the researchers as they "claimed there was enough evidence already" of negative side effects. The most prominent are hot flashes, headaches, depression, vagina discharge and fatigue. Other complications are the development of leukemia, bowel cancer, lethal blood clots and the possibility of going blind.

Dr. Sherry Roger's M.D., author of the newsletter Total Health,

has said: "Every woman (or every man who has a woman he loves) should never, NEVER fall for tamoxifen as a boost for cancer prevention. The public is being had." She has shown that the statistics that are usually quoted are inaccurate because the women who had uterine cancer and/or serious blood clots were not included in the cancer group. If they were included, then there would not be the 45% prevention that is touted in the press. I hope that this brief message will clarify the situation. No one should consider attempting this five-year treatment without understanding all of the possible adverse conditions that may result. There must be a thorough study of the benefits versus the risks.

Dr. Tandavan, 78, retired nuclear physician and hospital staff president, lives in Chicago, where he specializes in alternative healing arts. If you are interested in further articles on health and healing visit his home page.