



**Press Release
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The Pink Slip: Breast Cancer Drug Linked to Permanent Baldness

New York, NY, October 6, 2010—Each October, Breast Cancer Awareness Month trots out its annual parade of pinkwashing, from KFC pink buckets to a plethora of fundraising walks. Cancer, after all, is big business. But for breast cancer patients who become permanently bald after chemotherapy, there is nothing to celebrate. For them, cancer is not “a gift.”

A Head of Our Time is a worldwide group of breast cancer patients who have experienced long-term hair loss after chemotherapy. Instead of lacing up their sneakers for the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, they’re stepping out to raise awareness that, contrary to popular belief, hair doesn’t always return after chemotherapy. Increasingly, this psychologically devastating side effect is being linked to the drug Taxotere.

Even though Sanofi-Aventis, manufacturer of Taxotere, admits that 3% of patients given the drug could experience alopecia, or permanent hair loss, oncologists don’t seem to know anything about it. And no one is telling patients that their breast cancer treatment could leave them physically disfigured and emotionally scarred.

“I wasn’t freaked out when I lost my hair because I was told it would grow back,” said Jayne Hewitt, a member of A Head of Our Time in Kansas City, Kansas. “I was ready for the adventure of seeing how it would be. I wasn’t prepared for looking like the “Crypt Keeper” for life. It’s more than just being bald, it’s a constant reminder of cancer.”

Hewitt, like all members of A Head of Our Time, was reassured that her hair would return, despite a growing body of medical evidence to the contrary.

The first study, in 2006 by Dr. Scot Sedlacek, an oncologist at the Rocky Mountain Cancer Centers in Denver, Colorado, found that up to 6.3% of his study group administered Taxotere experienced Persistent Significant Alopecia (PSA), especially when given in combination with the drugs Adriamycin and Cyclophosphamide. Sedlacek defines PSA as hair regrowth of less than 50% of the pre-chemotherapy amount of hair.

“The one side effect possibly most dreaded by the patient is alopecia,” wrote Dr. Sedlacek. “Yet, we have always told our female patients don’t worry, [hair] will always come back. This last statement may not be true.”

French oncologist Hugues Bourgeois presented research on 82 patients with PSA to the 2009 San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium. He stated that persistent alopecia or suboptimal hair regrowth after chemotherapy is an “important side effect and must be considered by oncologists as optimal information to give to curable patients.”

More recently, a 2010 *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* indicates that the authors are seeing “an increasing number of reports of permanent chemotherapy-induced alopecia” (CIA) and they suggest that “docetaxel [Taxotere] is the implicated agent.”

All this non-disclosure adds up to much more than a bad hair day or—in these women’s cases—a no hair day. Unlike their breast cancer sisters, they will never be able to smile sweetly and call themselves “survivors.” The psychosocial impact is considerable.

“Everyone expects me to return to normal now that my cancer treatments are over. But I can’t,” said Jo McCord from Little Rock, Arkansas. “I smile and pretend everything is okay, but I’m a wreck inside. Every morning, it takes all my courage just to walk out the door. I used to be outgoing and carefree. Now I’m withdrawn and self-conscious. An invitation to a party creates stress, meeting new people is nerve-racking and a casual glance in the mirror can reduce me to tears.”

Dr. Ralph Trüeb, a Swiss dermatologist, wrote that “Few dermatologic conditions carry as much emotional distress as CIA.” According to one of his studies, “Forty-seven percent of female patients consider hair loss to be the most traumatic aspect of chemotherapy and 8% would decline chemotherapy due to fears of hair loss.”

Indeed, many women would rather lose a breast—the most stigmatized aspect of breast cancer—than lose their hair. Kelly Anderson, a member in New York City, said, “I had a double mastectomy and have never mourned the loss of my breasts... because I don’t feel that I really lost my breasts. They were just replaced with implants, and after reconstruction, my body has never looked better. But, this hair fiasco has been devastating.”

Yet despite the reported incidents and scientific evidence, PSA is not listed as a potential side effect on any breast cancer website. The Sanofi-Aventis website, www.taxotere.com, coyly states that hair “generally” returns after chemotherapy. So patients are having to make the agonizing decision to undergo an aggressive course of treatment without being fully informed of the possible side effects.

Denise Philips, a member in San Diego, California, who received Taxotere, plus Herceptin, a chemotherapy drug that can have a negative impact on the heart, said, “I was informed that there was a risk of heart damage with Herceptin, but I still decided to go ahead with the treatment. The difference is that it was MY decision. When that choice is taken away due to non-disclosure, it’s an assault and is inexcusable.”

According to the “Patients Bill of Rights”, adopted by the U.S. Advisory Commission on Consumer Protection and Quality in the Health Care Industry in 1998, and detailed on the American Cancer Society website, “You have the right to know your treatment options and take part in decisions about your care.”

So why aren’t breast cancer patients being informed of the risk of this psychologically devastating side effect? The undisclosed link between Taxotere and permanent hair loss is not about vanity. It’s about full and honest disclosure. And it’s about a patient’s right to make fully informed decisions about their treatment.

This October is more than an annual opportunity to look pretty in pink. It’s time to take off the rose-colored glasses and have a cold hard look at the facts.

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