

Breast Cancer Deception

by Sherrill Sellman

Every October since 1985, pink ribbons are displayed in posters, magazine advertisements, and proudly adorn women's lapels heralding Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The multitudes of runs, hikes, walks, and other fundraising events raise hundred of millions of dollars to conquer that dreaded scourge of the modern woman, breast cancer. High profile companies like Avon, Lee Denim, and Revlon have joined ranks along with the Susan G. Komen Foundation's "Race for the Cure", and the City of Hope Hospital's "Walk for Hope". Popular celebrities lead the charge.

Each year, 180,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and 44,000 will die of the disease. The US has one of the highest breast cancer rates in the world. Fifty years ago the incidence of Breast Cancer for a woman's lifetime risk was one in twenty. Now it has skyrocketed to one in eight. Clearly the so-called war on cancer has not even made a dent in the breast cancer epidemic as the rates continue to climb at the rate of one per cent per year.

The motto of Breast Cancer Awareness Month is "Early Detection is Your Best Protection". The National Cancer Institute stated in 1995 that "Breast cancer is simply not a preventable disease". This tune was reiterated in 1997 by the American Cancer Society who also announced that "there are no practical ways to prevent breast cancer -- only early detection."¹ So mammograms are the front line of defense. Celebrities like Rosie O'Donnell offer free t-shirts with the honorable words "I've Been Squished" if you'll make a date with your local x-ray department.

So let's all join in and wave our pink ribbons and don those running shoes and take to the roads, right? Wait! Before you get swept up by the emotional frenzy of this call to arms, there is something you should know.

Who Profits from Breast Cancer?

Breast Cancer Awareness month's primary sponsor and mastermind of the event in 1985 was Zeneca Pharmaceuticals, now known as AstraZeneca. Zeneca is the company that manufactures the controversial and widely prescribed breast cancer drug, Tamoxifen. Did you know all TV, radio, and print media campaigns are paid for and must be approved by Zeneca.

It is less known that Zeneca also makes herbicides and fungicides. One of their products, the organochlorine pesticide, Acetochlor is implicated as a causal factor in breast cancer. Its Perry Ohio chemical plant is the third largest source of potential cancer causing pollution in the U.S., spewing 53,000 pounds of recognized carcinogens into the air in 1996.²

Why The Breast Cancer Increase?

When it comes to environmental toxicity, carcinogens found in pesticides, herbicides, plastics, and other toxic chemicals that are known to cause cancer -- especially breast cancer -- there is booming silence by all Breast Cancer Awareness Month programs. Did the alarming increase of breast cancer rates just mysteriously happen? Or perhaps, the focus on the cure has conveniently ignored the cause?

After, all it wouldn't really be good PR for Zeneca to have it known that their chemical products directly contribute to the breast cancer epidemic.

Many experts predicted as far back as 30 years ago that cancer rates would increase, citing an explosion of synthetic chemicals. From 1940 through the early 1980's, production of synthetic chemicals increased by a factor of 350.

Billions of tons of toxic substances that never existed are now released into the environment. Yet only 3 percent of the 75,000 chemicals in use have been tested for safety.³ These toxic time bombs are found in our water, air, and soil. Women who live near toxic waste dumps have 6.5 times the incidence of breast cancer.

A survey conducted by Dr. Mary Wolff of Mt. Sinai Hospital, New York found that women with breast cancer had four times the levels of DDE found in non-carcinogenic tumors.⁴ Also, another study investigated why upper class women in the community of Newton, Massachusetts had higher breast cancer rates than the lower economic women.⁵ The researchers attributed the increase to greater use of professional lawn care service and more dry cleaning.

Pesticides & Breast Cancer

The pesticide breast cancer link was stunningly highlighted in research from Israel which linked three organochlorine pesticides detected in dairy products to an increase of 12 types of cancer in 10 different strains of mice. After public outcry in 1978, the Israeli government was forced to ban the pesticides Benzene Hexachloride, DDT, and Lindane. Interestingly, breast cancer mortality rates which had increased every year for 25 years, dropped nearly 8 per cent for all age groups and dropped more than a thirty-three percent for women ages 25-34 in 1986.⁶

The American Cancer Society was founded with the support of the Rockefeller family in 1913. Members of the chemical and pharmaceutical industry have long had a place on its board. Could that have something to do with the fact that the American Cancer Society's latest report on cancer prevention makes no mention of environmental factors?

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