

Vancouver Women's Health Collective ♀ La Collective de Santé des Femmes de Vancouver  
1501 West Broadway  
Vancouver, B.C.  
Canada  
V6J 1W6

June 8, 1981

Re: DEPO PROVERA

Dear Women:

Depo Provera is a long-acting injectable contraceptive manufactured by Upjohn Company.

Depo Provera is the trade name for Medroxyprogesterone acetate. It interferes with the normal pattern of hormonal changes usually associated with the menstrual cycle, preventing pregnancy for 3-6 months or longer.

Many serious effects of Depo Provera are well-documented:

- 1) In lab studies, it caused malignant breast tumors in beagle dogs.
- 2) It increases the risk of cervical cancer.
- 3) It increases the incidence of irregular bleeding which has led doctors to administer estrogen to control the bleeding, or to perform D & C or hysterectomy.
- 4) It is associated with birth defects in babies born to women exposed to the drug during pregnancy.
- 5) It causes long term infertility and possibly permanent sterility in many women, even after they have ceased taking the drug.
- 6) It inhibits bone growth. Experiments with young monkeys produced skeletal abnormalities. This is particularly frightening given that Depo Provera is carried in the breast milk of injected mothers.
- 7) It causes a significant number of women to become pre-diabetic or diabetic.

There is still much unknown about Depo Provera, and many more effects of the drug are suspected:

- 1) Longterm use of Depo Provera may result in chronic and malignant forms of uterine disease.
- 2) Depo Provera may be cancer-causing (particularly cervical and endometrial cancer).

- 3) Depo Provera may lower resistance to infection.
- 4) Depo Provera may cause premature aging.
- 5) Depo Provera may cause nausea, nervousness, chills, changes in skin pigmentation, painful menstruation, decrease in sex drive, diminished capacity for orgasm, and acne.

In 1978, the American FDA rejected Upjohn's application to approve Depo Provera as a contraceptive on the grounds that, in experiments, it showed increased incidence of breast cancer in beagle dogs. In the FDA's opinion, the benefits of this drug did not outweigh the risks.

In spite of this decision in the States, it is estimated that 3-5 million women worldwide are given the drug for contraception. This situation represents another massive experiment like those with the Pill, DES, and Thalidomide, which caused severe and unnecessary damage to thousands of women and some of their children, as well.

Recently, the Upjohn Company has appealed to the FDA to seek approval of Depo Provera for use as a contraceptive. If this happens, no doubt Canada will be close behind in approving the drug for contraception. Again, as in the case of the Pill, controlling fertility will be a priority over safety and women will be the victims on whom Depo Provera is experimented.

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective is attempting to document the extent to which Depo Provera is used as a contraceptive here in Canada. We have enclosed a poster for you to display in your women's centre, print in your newsletters, or distribute to other women's groups in your area.

Our future actions around Depo Provera may include legal ones (in co-ordination with the National Women's Health Network (U.S.)), publicity about Depo Provera, forming Depo Provera action groups, etc.. Please let us know what information you have about Depo Provera use in your area. We will keep you informed about what we are learning of its use in Canada.

Sincerely,

The Vancouver Women's  
Health Collective