

Women Beware of Doctors Over-Prescribing Drugs

Contributed by Webmaster

By Ann Marosy

I love the women of the Baby Boomer generation. They demanded world attention for their rights to equality in the sixties, changed the gender rules in the seventies, made their way into executive boardrooms in the eighties, and paved the way for the coming generations of their daughters and their daughter's daughters. Generations X and Y, and hopefully "Z", have a lot to thank them.

Today, younger adult women don't have to go through what they did for recognition and understanding. When I enrolled at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1981, I was the only female in my first accounting class. Today, there are equally the same if not more women in graduate university and advanced education courses than men. This is how dramatically things have changed. But have they?

Since my mid-forties, I have had reason to visit a lot of doctor's offices. I have been diagnosed as peri-menopausal, menopausal (differing opinions from different doctors), suffering from hypothyroidism, not suffering from hypothyroidism, Chronic Fatigue, no Chronic Fatigue, stress-related panic attacks, hypoglycaemia, hyperglycaemia - and the best of all - a recommendation that I should see a psychologist! All of these complaints and symptoms became more relevant when I later discovered I had severe adrenal problems - completely undiagnosed by all the doctors I saw. But for now, I just want to say, "God help the Baby Boomers!"

During the last few years, I have been in and out of so many doctor's offices, surgeries, and hospitals that I have lost track. I have visited Hormone Specialists, Gynaecologists, General Practitioners and been rushed into hospital Emergency Rooms on countless occasions. I have had more blood tests than any rational person is meant to endure; subjected to ECGs (electrocardiograms), X-rays, brain scans, chest scans, hearing tests, and spent hours upon hours in those wonderful little ER cubicles waiting for tests or wheeled around from testing lab to testing lab. Not once, not a couple of times, but countless times. I have had the top of my palm injected with horrible large needles while I've waited for hours for a scan, drip, or blood transfusion.

I have also been insulted, ignored, laughed at, and been given operative procedures, drugs and antibiotics against my expressed concerns. A hospital gynaecologist even asked me on one occasion whether my breasts were real. (I am naturally well endowed.) I believe he was being playful and it was meant to be a joke - but at the time, I was lying in a hospital Emergency Room bed, waiting for a 4-pack blood transfusion. Needless to say, I didn't find it very amusing at the time.

I am not a feminist. I know what strengths and weaknesses women have and acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses that men have. However, I am utterly astonished and dumbfounded at the way women are still being treated in the medical arena.

I am in total dismay at how the women of that gregarious, rebellious, open-minded, ground-breaking generation, the Baby Boomers, who led the revolution in changing the advertising, marketing, financial, and consumer-driven demands of the world, are still being treated as the 1950s stereotype female by the traditional medical community. And this includes some female doctors I have visited as well.

Every time I have visited a new doctor, the first typical response is, "its probably menopausal changes". Firstly, if all I have suffered were menopause symptoms, I'd be swinging from the rafters with glee. I don't wish to invalidate the women who have difficulties caused by hormonal changes, but with the new bio-identical hormone therapy available, menopause is an easier transition now than ever before.

Secondly, it worries me that the abruptness and immediacy of this instant diagnosis for women who happen to be in the 40 plus age group can potentially and dangerously prevent a real disease from accurate diagnosis and treatment or lead to misdiagnoses and serious consequences where there were none in the first place.

Men, younger women and now even teenagers and children are affected by similar circumstances. However, the typical and by far the larger demographic profile of wrongly diagnosed patients who fall victim to anti-depressants and tranquillisers are adult women.

Norma Finkelstein, Ph.D., of the Boston-based Coalition on Addiction, Pregnancy, and Parenting says, "Women tend to get addicted to prescription drugs like sedatives and tranquillisers more often than men do because doctors prescribe them to women more freely". She estimates that 70 percent of prescribed tranquillisers and sedatives in the US are given to women. In Australia, 2:1 or 66.7 percent is the estimated ratio for women. Finkelstein also adds, "Women have long been seen by the medical profession as hysterical and anxious - so rather than listening to the woman's problem, some doctors will just write a prescription for medication."

I recall the wisdom of a friend who once said, "Educate the mother and you educate the family". He was speaking of higher values at the time, but those words ring ominously in my mind now. Was the Rolling Stones' 1960s hit "Mother's Little Helper" a warning we didn't heed?

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