

Book Reviews

Worst Pills. Best Pills

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Pocket Books, Simon & Shuster

New York, NY 10020

Paperback, 772 pages, 1999

This is a book about drugs, how to use them, their potential side effects, what they should not be taken with and their desirability rating. I think this is probably very useful information but I have an element of doubt about the accuracy of the author's statements and evaluations. Normally when drugs are described in package inserts or in Compendiums the parent (owner) of these drugs has a chance to review what is said to make sure the facts are facts, not factoids. The drug companies may not like what is written but at least can agree with the accuracy of the remarks. Perhaps the descriptions in this book are inaccurate?

My doubts arise from their review of the vitamins, especially niacin. They write on page 608 that niacin is not useful in the treatment of schizophrenia. Vitamins have no parents, they are not patented, and have no one to defend them, no one to make sure that what is written is accurate, a fact not a factoid.

Readers of this journal over the past 30 years have seen over 50 reports describing the results of clinical observations showing that niacin is useful for the treatment of schizophrenia. The usefulness of this vitamin was first demonstrated by six double-blind prospective, placebo-controlled experiments ever completed in psychiatry under my direction in Saskatchewan as Director of Psychiatric Research and Associate Professor of Psychiatry, College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan at Saskatoon. These controlled trials are today considered the gold standard in therapeutic trials, except, of course, when they find that vitamins are therapeutic for more than the classical

deficiency diseases. These experiments have never been refuted and they have been corroborated. Since then a massive amount of clinical data has accumulated which confirms our earlier observations. These early experiments are described in my recently published book.¹

In the brief critical statement by the authors there is no acknowledgment of these facts indicating either that they are totally unaware or simply felt there was no need to present all the data fairly. It is for this reason I distrust much of what is written in this book, even about the drugs. I suspect that the physicians working for these drug companies might also have many quarrels with them. For if they cannot get their facts straight about something as simple as vitamins how can I expect them to get their facts straight about anything else? For readers of this book I have only one comment: Heed the old caution: Let the Buyer Beware.

—A. Hoffer, M.D, Ph.D., FRCP(C)

References

1. Hoffer A: *Vitamin B₃ & Schizophrenia: Discovery, Recovery, Controversy*. Quarry Press, Kingston, ON 2000.

Cancer and the Search for Selective Biochemical Inhibitors

E.J. Hoffman

CRC Press LLC, Boca Raton, FL

560 pages, 1999

In mid June I asked CRC Press LLC to send me their recent book. The title was very intriguing. Because of my interest in orthomolecular treatment of cancer¹ (1150 patients since 1977) I hoped that this book would be very valuable to me in my practice. A few days later Carol Hollander wrote that she was sending me this book which arrived a few days after that. I really did not know what to expect but assumed it would be a modern discussion

of ways and means of dealing with the various cancers that today afflict mankind. Since then I have been dipping into this book. I use this term advisedly because it is simply impossible to read it as one would any other book. It is an amazing reference book to the vast modern literature on the causes of cancer, and the actual and potential chemical treatment that might be of value. I realized after several dippings that cancer is lot more complicated than I had originally thought. My Ph.D. in chemistry, obtained fifty years ago, did not equip me to understand the chemistry in this book even though I have attempted over the years to keep up. Nevertheless I am pleased I have the book and I want to share with you why I think it is going to be so valuable for research scientists in the field who have escaped the bonds of orthodoxy and are willing to look at nature's vast pharmacy found in the enormous number of plants, bacteria, fungi and other living organism.

Chapter 1, about ten percent of this book, describes the biochemistry and treatment of cancer in great detail. For investigators delving into the enormously complex chemistry in the body this is essential material. It describes the basic reactions in the body and the role played by vitamins, minerals, enzymes (orthomolecular substances), viruses, and by antibiotics and other xenobiotics. In the following Chapter, plant biochemistry and cancer are discussed. This is where the next major discoveries for the treatment of cancer will probably come from. It then follows that if plants are going to be so important one should know something about the classification and chemistry. Taxonomy in Chapter 3 follows. The remaining chapters describe in marvellous detail the role of alkaloids, fungi, viruses and other anticancer agents.

Hoffman writes "The literature (and medical folklore) already indicates that there are arrays of such bioactive substances, notably from the plant or herbal

world- even foodstuffs- expressible as phytochemicals (plant chemicals). Many or most of these substances, unfortunately may have adverse or even life-threatening side effects." He therefore recommends the widespread establishment of Cancer Clinical Research Centers where serious and proper consideration would be given to the most promising of the leads now available. He recommends that these centers must be far wider ranging than are today's clinical centers. He writes "There is the thought that a biochemical cure or cures for cancer already exist. As with Michelangelo's philosophy of sculpting, it is a matter of chipping away to find the finished form, which was there all the time. Sometimes referred to as alternative medicine, there is the inference that the cure or cures will precede the complete understanding". I recommend that when these centers are created they be called "The Linus Pauling Orthomolecular Centers for the Study of the Cancers."

I have gained more understanding of the biochemistry of cancer and have renewed interest in two vitamins, folic acid and panthothenic acid, as a result of reading this book. Both were discovered by my friend Dr. Roger Williams. Folic acid in large doses deserves serious examination. It is as safe as the other water soluble vitamins and I have used up to 49 mg daily for many conditions, especially more recently for depression. I have not considered pantothenic acid but I have often wondered why it is not being used more and I will now use it. It is very safe and can be taken in large doses with no side effects.

As you may gather, I like his book. If "The Linus Pauling Orthomolecular Centers for the Study of the Cancers" are ever established, I hope this book will be one of the first in their library.

—A. Hoffer, M.D., Ph.D., FRCP(C)

References

1. Hoffer, A. *Vitamin C and Cancer*. Quarry Press, Kingston, ON 2000.