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Daily Express – Statins

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The Daily Express front page on 25th September 2009 exposes some truths about the cholesterol lowering drugs, statins. Exposing the truth about extensive side-effects as if this was particularly new information, it is good to see a national newspaper not towing the line of the spin doctors within the pharmaceutical industry.

Whilst I am always pleased when national newspapers expose dangers of medication as is so often the case the article does not go far enough. Although the Daily Express highlights the large number of side-effects created by statins – tummy upsets, liver problems, muscle pains, memory loss, sexual problems, depression and disturbed sleep – it fails to point out the occasional fatality due to myositis (inflammation of muscles, fatal if it happens to be the heart muscle). The ongoing attempts to create a “superpill” containing a statin will, hopefully, be derailed as the truth about statins comes to light. It is not that any of this is new – the facts have been evident since statins came to the market. I request all my patients to go to the World Wide Web when they are confronted by the potential prescribing of a statin and type in “statin women” and “statin Co-Q10”. Just these two visits to the web will come up with millions of articles which predominantly suggest that life expectancy is not increased in women if they reduce their cholesterol levels with a statin and more worryingly statins lead to deficiency in a vital nutrient, ubiquinone, known as Co-Q10.

If women’s life expectancy is not increased by statins it means that as heart disease and strokes diminish in number the statins must be causing an increase in fatality through other causes. Certainly in the elderly there is strong evidence that statins block cholesterol’s conversion to the stress hormone cortisol and negatively the immune system. Not dealing with stress and not having an immune system when you are elderly increases your chance of infections and at a time when we are facing the flu season and Swine Flu should we not be wary?

Well, perhaps the public would not be expected to know but I am baffled why a majority of doctors are not aware of these basic and available facts. Why is it that the simple expedience of providing co-enzyme Q10 at the time of prescribing a statin is not set in stone in every doctor’s mind? A well known TV doctor is quoted as saying “Statins are wonderful for patients who tolerate them well but a lot of people can’t. The more we prescribe them the more we realise they are not the benign drugs we thought”. Once again, doctors are prescribing on the back of inadequate information principally because the full story is rarely told to the over-burdened and busy doctor who follows guidelines presented to them by the pharmaceutical companies. It started with Thalidomide, has progressed through HRT, Co-Proxamol, Vioxx and scores of drugs less well known withdrawn from the market each year despite having passed “safety” tests as set by our medical governing bodies.

An excellent exposé of this particular issue can be read on www.29billion.com or the acquisition of Justin Smith’s book ‘\$29 Billion Reasons ‘To Lie About Cholesterol’.

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