Laetrile: Cancer Cure Or Quackery?

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By DEL SCHRADER

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The battle over Laetrile as a cancer treatment drug is being furiously waged in the media, in the courts, laboratories, on street corners and in study sessions.

A dead woman was involved as a plaintiff in a suit filed July 8 in San Jose. It contends that the State Department of Health’s 1963 order banning use of Laetrile in cancer treatment is unconstitutional.

Josephine Bergman of Altos, listed as a plaintiff, died July 7 after being ill with cancer for a year and a half. She was 48 and a patient of Dr. Stewart M. Jones, 55, of Palo Alto.

The suit said Stanford Hospital refused to allow Dr. Jones to prescribe and administer Laetrile to Mrs. Bergman while she was a patient in the hospital last February and March.

Laetrile, also known as vitamin B-17, is a substance made from apricot and peach pits. Oddly enough, although banned as a cancer treatment, controversial Laetrile may be used as a nutritional supplement.

Mrs. Betty Lee Morales, a Los Angeles nutritional consultant, told the Herald-Examiner, “Cancer is the only disease controlled politically. A doctor can put ice cream on an arthritic knee, but can only use surgery, X-ray or chemo-therapy in the treatment of cancer otherwise, he can be put in jail.

More than 20 foreign nations now use Laetrile for cancer treatment, but the American Medical Assn. (AMA) and the Food Drug Administration (FDA) keep it a crime in the U.S.”

Mrs. Morales counters, “The biggest problem the U.S. faces is solving its cancer, but it’s tough getting information to the people. Why, I have watched one of the biggest daily newspapers and one of the biggest TV networks buckle under to the Establishment.”

Mrs. Lorraine Rosenthal, cofounder with Mrs. Morales of the Cancer Control Society in Hollywood, told the Herald-Examiner, “They say Laetrile pills are being peddled on the streets of Tijuana, but Californians don’t have to go to Mexico for Laetrile. They can buy it here in California under the name of Amygdalin from four or five sources. Remember, Laetrile is only a phone call away.

But for those patients who do go to Mexico, a medical doctor, Ernesto Contreras, treats many, many sufferers every year in his office at Playa de Tijuana.”

Millions, even billions, of words have gone in the Great Laetrile Debate. Dean Burk of the National Cancer Institute, recently stated, “I don’t know whether Laetrile is any good, or how good it is — but I believe it should be tested so we can find out. So far, all the actions of the FDA have been based on prejudice, ignorance, and superstition.”

Dr. Burk cited five Laetrile tests around the world since the father-son team of Drs. Ernst Krebs Jr. and Sr. in 1950 discovered the biochemical abilities of apricot kernels in San Francisco.

The tests:

Southern Research Institute, Birmingham, Ala., where a majority of 280 mice bearing Lewis lung cancers received 400 mg. of Laetrile per kilogram of body weight and showed increased life spans.

Sloan-Kettering, where mice bearing spontaneous mammary cancer were treated with amounts from one to two grams of Laetrile per kilogram of body weight. Tests showed spread of cancer inhibited, with the animals showing greater health.

Scind Laboratories, University of San Francisco, where 400 test rats bore 256 carcinoma. Two hundred rats treated with B-17 showed an 80 per cent increase in life span over those not treated with B-17.

Pasteur Institute, Paris, where researchers maintained a human cancer strain in mice. Their life span was increased and tumor growth delayed up to an amazing 100 per cent by use of B-17, Dr. Burk’s figures revealed.

Institute Von Ardenne, Dresden, Germany, where researchers received similar findings, according to Dr. Burk.

But the battle to control the minds of men and women continues. The Cancer Control Journal, printed in Los Angeles, recently had a picture of comedian Red Buttons and his wife on page one with the caption, “Red Buttons says: ‘Laetrile saved my wife from death by cancer.’ ” Another headline read: The Watergate of Cancer Politics!

What’s needed to crack open the pit to obtain the kernel — Mexican mortar & pestle — demonstrated by Lorraine Rosenthal.

A final word from Betty Lee Morales: “The trouble with Laetrile is that more than 90 percent of all patients already gone through chemo-therapy, X-ray or surgery, but the late Dr. Ernst T. Krebs Sr. still cured 98 percent of those who came to him. He cured more than a thousand before he died at 94. I’m proud of the 10 years I spent with him.”

Excerpts from: Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, Sunday, July 21, 1974
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Background

Setting

-Cancer Patients

Time Frame

-1830's Discovery
-1977 FDA found it to be unsafe and ineffective

People Involved

-Cancer patients, Laetrile manufacturers, Government, professional organizations (AMA, APHA, etc.), researchers, physicians, advocacy groups

Primary Stakeholders

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LAEETRILE

- Alternative treatment for cancer
- Also known as: Amygdalin, vitamin B17, Amigdalina B-17
- Found in the kernels of apricots, peaches and almonds
- "The perfect chemotherapeutic agent" because it will kill cancer cells while being non-toxic to normal cells
- Thought to be preventative cancer therapy in addition to treatment
Laetrile
Arguments

FOR

- Freedom to choose treatments
- Accounts of success
  - Reduction in pain, tumor shrinkage (Navarro, 1957)
  - Tumor reduction, increase in well-being (Guidetti, 1955)
  - Complete tumor remission (California Medical Association, 1953)
- More research necessary

AGAINST

- Proposed Mechanisms of Action
  - Beta-glucosidase and glucuronidase
  - Rhodanese deficiency
  - Vitamin B17
  - Cyanide toxicity
  - Opportunity cost
  - Wasted money on a treatment that does not work
  - No significant evidence that it works
  - False hope
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Important Dates

- 1830 Amygdalin isolated by French chemists
- 1845 used in Russia for cancer treatment
- 1895 used in Germany
- 1920 Krebs Sr. used apricot kernels to treat cancer
- 1952 Krebs Jr. purified amygdalin to make Laetrile
- 1953 Cancer Commission of California Medical Association Study
• 1962 Marrone Study & Navarro Study
• 1963 USFDA report
• 1977 Judge allows court order to allow Laetrile to be brought into the USA
• 1978 Federal court ruled laetrile exempt from FDA’s new drug requirements
• 1980 Steve McQueen’s laetrile treatment & death
• 1982 NCI report published
Studied by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in 1978 through a retrospective case review.

At this time about 75,000 people in the US had taken Laetrile. 93 positive cases were submitted and only 6 of those had significant tumor shrinkage.

A study performed between 1979 and 1981 at medical around the United States of America. About 175 patients with different types of cancer were treated with a used regimen of Laetrile and metabolic therapy. In 1982 it was published that one patient had major tumor shrinkage at first. Out of the all the patients, 91% of their cancers had progressed after 3 months and the median survival was less than 5 months. Within 8 months the cancer grew within starting the treatment.

Works cited from American Cancer Society:
http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/complementaryandalternativemedicine/pharmacologicalandbiologicaltreatment/laetrile
Important Dates

- 1930 Amygdalin isolated by French chemists
- 1943 Used in Russia for cancer treatment
- 1945 used in Germany
- 1920 Krebs Sr. used apricot kernels to treat cancer
- 1942 Krebs Jr. purified amygdalin to make Laetrile
- 1955 Cancer Commission of California Medical Association Study
- 1962 Harrons Study & Navarro Study
- 1963 U.S. FDA report
- 1977 Judge allows Court order to allow Laetrile to be brought into the USA
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At that time about 15,000 people in the US had taken Laetrile. Of positive cases were cured and only 5 of those had proven and cancer surgery.

A study performed between 1969 and 1971 at medical centers showed the treated effects of generous carotenoid with different types of cancer were treated with a new regimen of chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

In 1979 it was published that two patients who were treated with Laetrile at that time of the study participated and underwent chemotherapy. One of those two patients was treated with the cancer gene killer affecting the treatment.

Viewed by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in 1977 through a retrospective case review.
- Protect the public
  limit harmful drugs
- Violate freedom of choice
  force cancer patients to Mexico
Free Market
- weakness of buyers from the fogged vision of cancer patients equals PROFIT
- elimination of laetrile from the market allows competing cancer medication manufacturers a monopoly on the treatment of the disease.

\[ 1.5 \times 10^{12} \]

What the FDA sees

Cancer Patient

Laetrile Manufactures

$\$$$$
The Rich Get Richer, While The Terminally Sick Get Sicker

Ethics Violated

- Profiting off a drug you knew didn’t work
  - Couldn’t provide a mechanism of action
  - Claimed it was a vitamin
  - 17-fold increase in profits after beginning to treat with Laetrile - John Richardson
- Fabrication of Data?
  - Alleged claims of treating 100s of patients a month
  - Few records/case histories (10) of your “treated” patients?
  - Either Negligence or False Information

Consequences

- Endangerment of Patients
  - Cyanide Poisoning
  - False Hope
- Costs to Society
  - Skepticism
  - Inability to Trust
Moving Forward

- Increase Access of information
- Educate patients and Healthcare Professionals
- Continue the Discussion
Thank you for your time
Works Cited


