



Cancer Prevention Coalition

*Avoidable Exposures:
Patients*

Fighting for a safer environment at home, in the community, and at work

Chemical Companies Profiting from Tamoxifen

How are Chemical Companies Profiting from Tamoxifen drug? A Conflict of Interest Story

Q. Why doesn't Breast Cancer Awareness Month (NBCAM) include warnings about chemical carcinogens you could avoid?

A. National Breast Cancer Awareness Month was conceived and funded in 1984 by **Imperial Chemical Industries**, one of the world's largest petrochemical manufacturers.

As the multimillion-dollar funder of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca influences every leaflet, poster, and commercial product produced by the campaign. It's no wonder these publications focus almost exclusively on mammography while ignoring carcinogenic industrial chemicals and their relation to breast cancer. When it founded Breast Cancer Awareness Month in 1985, AstraZeneca (formerly known as Zeneca before it merged with the Swedish pharmaceutical company Astra) was owned by Imperial Chemical Industries, a leading international manufacturer of industrial chemicals and carcinogenic pesticides. National Breast Cancer Awareness Month is a masterful public relations coup for AstraZeneca, providing the company with valuable, albeit undeserved, goodwill from millions of American women.

AstraZeneca profits from treating breast cancer, and hopes to profit still more from the prospects of large-scale national use of Tamoxifen for breast cancer "prevention." The NCI and the ACS both embraced AstraZeneca's new drug, aggressively launching a "chemoprevention" program in 1992 aimed at recruiting 16,000 healthy women at "high risk" of breast cancer. The five-year clinical trial claimed that Tamoxifen reduced breast cancer risks by 30 percent. The risks of this toxic drug, including potentially fatal uterine cancer and blood clots, were noted but trivialized. As the trials progressed, it became clear that the risk of serious complications outweighed professed benefits. Women have still not been informed about delayed risks of liver cancer. Equally troubling, neither the ACS nor the NCI has pursued evidence that regular use of a cheap, non-patented, over-the-counter drug—**aspirin**—has been shown to reduce risks of breast cancer. (A 1996 study found that women who took aspirin three times a week for five years reduced their risk by up to 30 percent, a finding worth pursuing.)

For years the American Cancer Society (ACS) demonstrated its allegiance to the multibillion-dollar cancer drug industry by aggressively attacking potential competitors through its "Committee on Unproven Methods of Cancer Management," created to "review" unorthodox or alternative therapies. This committee, staffed by "volunteer health care professionals," invariably promoted mainstream, expensive, and arguably toxic drugs patented by major pharmaceutical companies, and opposed alternative or "unproven" therapies, which are generally cheap, non-patentable, and minimally toxic. As with Senator Joseph McCarthy's blacklist of suspected communists, once a clinician or oncologist was associated with "unproven methods," harassment and blackballing often

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followed, and funding would dry up. This witch hunt against alternative practitioners was in striking contrast to the Society's uncritical endorsement of conventional toxic chemotherapy, despite increasing concern that chemotherapy may not significantly improve survival rates for most cancers. After an extensive review of clinical oncology studies, for example, Dr. Ulrich Abel of the Institute of Epidemiology and Biometry at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, concluded that for most patients chemotherapy functions as little more than a placebo, with an attendant decline in quality of life from the toxic treatment.

Excerpted from [The High Stakes of Cancer Prevention](http://www.tikkun.org/) by Samuel Epstein and Liza Gross. *Tikkun* Nov/Dec 2000 <http://www.tikkun.org/>

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