

■ Steroid therapy continues despite known dangers

The July 15, 1998 issue of the *Journal of Clinical Investigation*, reports that medical doctors continue to prescribe prolonged steroid therapy for millions of Americans despite the fact that research has proven it can lead to serious bone loss (osteoporosis) that weakens the bones.

The study was conducted at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in conjunction with the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System. The researchers said, "Basically, our findings revealed that when animals or humans take high doses of steroids, not only fewer bone-forming cells are made, but they are dying prematurely."

The lead author of the study, Dr. Robert Weinstein says, "Our study shows that steroid-induced osteoporosis arises from changes in the number of bone cells available to maintain bone, causing eventual fractures and, also, collapse of large joints. No bone is spared from the steroid-induced bone loss, but the effects are more dramatic in the spine and in the hip. Unlike common age-and gender-related types of osteoporosis, this form of the disease occurs at any age, even in children. Not infrequently, patients that took steroids for many years end up in a wheelchair."

The researchers pointed out that medicine has known about the long term effects of steroid use for 60 years yet continue to use them more and more often.

Why? Doctors seem to be ignorant of the dangers. Weinstein says. "A recent survey of physicians showed that most underestimated the risk of [steroid]-induced osteoporosis in men and women. Only 25% ranked osteoporosis as one of the top three side effects of high-dose [steroid] therapy in a 45 year-old premenopausal woman and 8% ranked it as one of the top three side effects in a 45 year-old man." ▲

■ Mood Disorders Common With Long-Term Steroid Use

A study in the May 2004 issue of the *Annals of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology* reports that people who take steroids long-term for conditions such as asthma stand a higher chance of developing mood disorders such as depression or manic depression.

The study involved 20 patients who had been using steroids at least six months for asthma or rheumatic disease and 14 similar patients not using steroids. Both groups were tested to evaluate mood.

60% (12) of the steroid users were formally classified as having a mood disorder. Additionally, one of the tests indicated that the steroid users were at increased risk for developing manic symptoms.

Common head injury treatment dangerous

The May 26, 2005 issue of the British medical journal The Lancet reports that using corticosteroids for the treatment for head injuries increases the risk of death or severe disability. The procedure has been used for the past 30 years

The study, known as the CRASH trial, involved more than 10,000 adults with head injuries. In 2004, the CRASH researchers reported that treatment with steroids increased the risk of death at the two-week follow-up point. Now, at the six-month follow-up point, they find that the risk of death or severe disability was also higher in the steroid group than the placebo group.

Lead researcher Phil Edwards, M.D., of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine says, “Corticosteroids are also used to treat spinal cord injury, and given the CRASH trial results, this practice should be urgently re-evaluated. Other widely used treatments for head injuries should also be properly evaluated in large-scale trials. The long-standing neglect of trauma care research is a scandal, and patients are dying needlessly as a result of it.”