

BLACK MARKET BREASTS

By Sandra Mesics

These days, a new drug is making the black market rounds, joining cocaine, marijuana, amphetamines, and barbiturates as illegally obtained, abused medication. The drug -- ESTROGEN.

Female hormones, which were developed in the early 1960's as female contraceptives and replacement drugs for post-menopausal women, are also used to treat preoperative transsexuals. The effect on the male body is to create female secondary sex characteristics; enlarged breast, widened hips, softer skin, and increased nipple size. However, with continued estrogen use, these changes come at a price--there is also a decreased sex drive, as well as eventual atrophy of the male sex organs--in other words, after prolonged use of estrogen, the penis will eventually shrink, the testicles will shrink and eventually lose their ability to produce sperm. In some cases, these effects are temporary, and will reverse themselves when the male stops taking the estrogens. However, at some point, these changes will become permanent, and going off estrogen will not bring back the ability to function sexually and reproductively as a male.

Of course, for the preoperative transsexual, these changes are welcome. A person who is enroute to sex reassignment surgery will not miss erections or the ability to function sexually as a male. The danger lies in the increased number of males who are playing with estrogens, in hopes of feminizing their bodies while still retaining their abilities to function as males. With a carefully controlled dose of estrogen, it may be possible to have the "best of both worlds," but unfortunately, the people who want this combination aren't usually getting carefully controlled doses. They are experimenting on themselves, obtaining the estrogen illegally, and taking a varying number of pills, sometimes overdosing themselves.

Estrogens also carry with them a host of possible side effects, some of them minor,

others life-threatening. Among the minor effects are increased skin sensitivity to light, nausea, vomiting, weight gain, and depression. Among the more serious side effects are a increased chance of liver tumors, which although usually benign, have a tendency to hemorrhage, sometimes proving fatal. Then there is the increased risk of heart attack, stroke, phlebitis, and blood clots in the lungs. While the jury is still out on the relationship between estrogen and cancer, it is probably that persons taking estrogen are at a high risk to develop some forms of cancer.

A person receiving estrogens under the care of a physician will usually be warned of these side effects, and with proper follow-up care, can be screened for any signs of trouble. The dosage can be monitored by having periodic blood tests and changed if necessary, tailored to the individual. But on the black market, there are no warnings, and the person is on their own regarding the proper amount of estrogen to take. Individuals with circulatory problems who would normally be warned not to take estrogen are taking it, and problems can get beyond the treatable stage before any adverse signs are seen. While female hormones are treated as innocuous drugs on the street, they are potentially lethal.

Who is selling estrogens, and who are they selling them to? A counsellor at Philadelphia's Eromin Center, an agency that specializes in counseling sexual minorities, said that the illegal street sellers of estrogens are usually the "street queens" or homosexual transvestities who work as prostitutes. They obtain prescriptions from more than one doctor, and then sell the extra prescriptions at a profit, to supplement their uncertain income from hustling. And who do they sell the hormones to? To the persons who are either unwilling or unable to go to a physician themselves; mainly young teenage male homosexuals who are too young to march into a doctor's office and get treatments.

Some hustlers sell their pills to some of their "tricks" who are themselves practicing crossdressers and have a desire for some degree of feminization. These cust-

BLACK MARKET BREASTS--Cont'd from Page 8

omers are oftentimes married or in positions of responsibility, who for their own reasons are reluctant to consult with a physician for hormone therapy, or would, in most cases be denied hormones for some reason. Many transvestites have no problems in paying the high black market price of the hormones. One such "street queen" admitted that she had been obtaining hormones from three different physicians, and had sold off two of the prescriptions to transvestites, through her own personal contacts, and even through the mail--in the personal columns in several transvestite magazines. She admitted that the extra income was nice, and indeed it was pure profit--at the time, she was on welfare, and she obtained the estrogens at no cost. Admittedly, this is an extreme example, and with welfare cutbacks, free estrogen treatment is a thing of the past. However, not that many street queens have to pay for their prescriptions, they are more apt to sell some of their pills to pay for the treatments.

Part of the problem in curbing the illegitimate estrogen trade is the easy accessibility of the hormones by prescription. Almost every large metropolitan area has at least one "hormone doctor", a physician who treats preoperative transsexuals and almost anybody else who requests estrogens, without asking too many questions. These physicians usually operate independently from gender identity clinics and do not impose the same stringent requirements on their patients. For instance, most gender identity clinics will prescribe estrogen therapy for the patient only after a psychiatric workup, whereas the independants usually ask only a few questions. Sometimes the psychiatric workup is a five minute dialogue.

However, recently because of pressure from gender identity clinics, (who want a corner of the estrogen market) many independant physicians are requiring their patients to have a psychiatric workup prior to estrogen therapy. It is likely that this will have an effect on the black market hormone business, if nothing else,

SUPPORT YOUR ACLU TRANSEXUAL RIGHTS
COMMITTEE EITHER DIRECTLY OR THROUGH
THE JOHN AUGUSTUS FOUNDATION
—
PROTECT YOUR RIGHTS AND THE RIGHTS
OF OTHERS

driving the prices up. But there are still other ways of getting the pills into the hands of those who want them.

An ex-transvestite who runs a store frequented by many crossdressers has been selling Premarin (an estrogen) "under the counter" for the past year. He has a contact in a pharmaceutical supply house who is able to get the pills at wholesale cost. He then marks them up and sells them to closet transvestites who want the pills but either have been rejected by gender clinics or who are reluctant to go to the independant physicians. He admits that his business is brisk, and although he says that he sells only to people he screens, the demand is so high, he has a hard time getting the supply. Once word gets out among the underground that hormones are available, the demand is tremendous.

In the author's seven years experience as editor of Female Impersonator News, a publication aimed at transvestites, I received an average of about one letter a week from men requesting estrogens. A lot of the letters came from people in remote, rural locations, who obviously would have a hard time making the black market connection in their area. The way some of the letters were written made me question the ability of the person to handle the treatments--I think some them were outright psychotics. My advise to all of them was to go tell their story to a doctor and hope for the best. I doubt most of them did so. Sometimes, when I think about the money I could have made if I had decided to become a "pusher", it staggers my mind.

Continued on page 10

BLACK MARKET BREASTS--Cont'd from Page 9

Some of the people requesting the hormones are living in a fantasy world. Many are occasional crossdressers who somehow get the idea that having breasts and wider hips and a larger derriere would be a sexual kick. They think they can juggle the estrogen dosage so they get their breasts without having any of the undesirable effects. What some of them don't even stop to consider is the effects on their everyday lives--what happens if they have to go shirtless or wind up in a hospital for an emergency procedure? What if they are heterosexual, and go to bed with women--what would a woman think of a man with breasts? If the crossdresser is married, what of the wife?

In the transvestite pornographic literature, men with breasts abound. In fact, if it seems to be almost a requirement for models in these magazines to have some sort of breast development, if not from hormones, then through silicone implants. Since the magazines are selling well, there must be some sort of appeal for this type of "hermaphrodite" individual, perhaps only a "freak" appeal. Yet, the crossdresser feels a sense of pressure to go on hormones--its a kind of peer pressure, to become part of the group. The street queens all admit that having breasts is important in attracting customers, as well as having a functioning penis.

What is likely to happen in the black market estrogen trade? Sooner or later, someone may die from the illegal hormones, and then perhaps the lid will blow off. Already we have seen some pressure brought against the independent hormone doctors to screen their patients more carefully, but this will perhaps only have a small effect on the trade. Until then, it seems likely that the black market trade in estrogens will continue at a brisk pace, uncontrolled by law enforcement officials, unless of course, the phenomenon of men with breasts dies off. At this point, its' too early to tell.