



The Truth About Bioidentical Hormones

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“**B**ioidentical hormones,” “compounded hormones,” and “natural hormones” are names that attract public attention. Unfortunately, these seriously-sounding names have very little, if any, scientific meaning or value.

A few years ago, these clever terms began to appear in the advertising media as buzz words to get the attention of people who are health conscious. Those key words are also very attractive to consumers who feel that a “natural approach” to treatment has to be both safe and environmentally-friendly. Bioidenticals gained even more popularity when many commercially-produced drugs were found to be dangerous by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), a federal agency in charge of consumers’ safety. Some media savvy celebrities used FDA’s problems with commercial drugs to further promote sales of bioidenticals.

One can ask why FDA did not step in right away to regulate these products. Many people do not even know that the well intentioned law, “Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act” of 1994, pre-

vented FDA from doing so. Due to this law, FDA is unable to regulate “natural products” unless it is proven that these products hurt people, or that untrue claims are made about them. While many pharmacies were doing a good job of compounding (i.e., custom preparing) drugs, the overblown advertising of bioidenticals by some other pharmacies was getting out of control. The vast majority of respected medical organizations, including American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists and American Medical Association, became very concerned about patients’ safety and use of bioidenticals. For this reason, all of those concerned medical societies have asked FDA to act in the interest of patients’ safety.

Finally, FDA found that several pharmacies were most likely making false claims about safety and benefit of bioidenticals. The only purpose of checking on compounding pharmacies is to make sure that the medications made there are safe and useful. It is important to be sure that compounded hormones are not soiled and have the right amount of the correct ingredients. It also makes sense

for compounding pharmacies to provide patients with real (not falsified) information about their products. Such information should include not only list of benefits, but also warnings and information about likely side effects. Traditional, large drug companies have been doing this for many years.

In reality, these so called bioidentical hormones are nothing special. They are chemicals - just like those in medications made by pharmaceutical companies. A pharmacist purchases these chemicals and puts them into a form of a pill, cream or gel. There is no reason to believe they are any safer than their commercial versions. Actually, they can be more dangerous than commercial drugs, as there may be no quality control on chemicals purchased for compounding.

The usefulness of custom made gels or creams has not been well tested either. These products are sometimes marketed as being custom designed for each person, based on an evaluation by a pharmacist. “Salivary hormone testing” is often done to determine how much of each hormone a person needs. Unfortunately,

this determination is not usually done in consultation with a physician. This is illegal in many states – and rightfully so. Physicians, and not pharmacists, are properly trained to treat patients. Besides these serious legal problems, these “saliva tests” are often not accurate. In fact, they are not approved by the FDA for patients’ care, and may be used only in research experiments. Many people who believe that traditional medicine is “chancy and risky” turn to these methods because they believe they are safer. It is ironic, then, that the tests for determining doses of those medications are officially allowed to be used only in research experiments.

Since bioidentical hormones and saliva testing are neither scientifically proven nor FDA approved, insurance companies will not pay for them. There is again a very good reason for this, since in contrast to what we are being told, we do not know if those compounded hormones are safe or if they even work. Many people spend their money on “natural,” “bioidentical,” or “compounded hormones” and end up hurting both their health and their wallets. **TFM**