

## Letter to the Editors

---

### My dream

I am going to share with you a short dream that I have had. Just imagine that a message was being sent, through the news agencies, by many physicians to women all over the world. This was their message:

“We, the physicians, who participated in a widely publicized study, known as the Women’s Health Initiative (WHI), deeply regret that our results were so severely misinterpreted by the media and also by a large segment of the medical profession. This has resulted in a large wave of what might be called *hormonal terrorism*, with great damage to women’s health. As investigators of that study, we did our best to accurately report the findings. *However, as physicians, we feel a collective responsibility to explain* to all women and doctors what these results meant in order to avoid the ongoing misinterpretations.

For technical reasons, the design of that study *was not aimed at assessing the efficacy and side-effects* of the hormonal treatments, known as HRT, that are given to a great majority of *symptomatic* menopausal women between the ages of 45 and 55 years. Instead, the same medication and the same dosage were given to much older women *without symptoms*; this explains the many side-effects due to overdosage. This was not our responsibility: it was the imposed design of the study. *We, as individual physicians, would never treat our menopausal women like that!*

However, *as physicians, we feel an ethical and social responsibility to tell people*, beyond our frontiers, wherever those results have reached, that women should not be unduly alarmed. The results of that study do not apply to the individual woman but rather to large populations, as said in a press conference held at the National Institutes of Health, July 9, 2002. The so-called increased risk of side-effects refers only to ‘relative risks’ that are nothing but a percentage increase over the real ‘absolute risks’. And these are minimal, much

less than 1 case per 1000 women treated over 1 year. This is a much lower risk than tobacco use is for lung cancer, obesity for breast cancer or oral contraceptive use + smoking for cardiovascular disease.

*Therefore*, women should not be unduly alarmed to continue with a properly indicated HRT, if there are no contraindications. Above all, they should not stop and switch to the so-called natural products, or plant estrogens, that are devoid of efficacy and have not yet been studied as to their side-effects.

Hormones are no better or worse than any other medication that is taken every day. All active medications have good effects and some side-effects, too. Even, inactive pills, known as placebos, may also cause side-effects.

*Therefore*, we encourage all women to pay attention to proper nutrition, to exercise, to a healthy life-style and not to panic and misinterpret the results of our studies which were circulated all over the world.

*As physicians, we still believe that the so-called HRT is the best medication, with more benefits than risks*, for symptomatic menopausal women, if there are no contraindications.

In conclusion, we also feel, as others have said, that ‘preventing a woman from the sound benefits of a properly instituted hormonal medication, just for the fear of rare side-effects, is not a satisfactory medicine...’

Signed by the physicians who participated in the WHI’

*This was my dream...I very much wish that it might soon become real.*

Av. António Augusto  
Aguiar 24-2 DT  
Lisbon  
1050-016  
Portugal

M. NEVES-E-CASTRO

<b>DCLI</b>	
<b>Manuscript No.</b>	<b>100296</b>
<b>Author</b>	
<b>Editor</b>	
<b>Master</b>	
<b>Publisher</b>	

**Climacteric**  
Typeset by Elite Typesetting for



**Parthenon Publishing**



[www.elitetypesetting.com](http://www.elitetypesetting.com)

# QUERIES: to be answered by AUTHOR

**AUTHOR:** The following queries have arisen during the editing of your manuscript. Please answer the queries by marking the requisite corrections at the appropriate positions in the text.

QUERY NO.	QUERY DETAILS	QUERY ANSWERED
	<b>No Queries</b>	