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Opinion: Where were the warnings about Depo-Provera?

By **Roopal Luhana**
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A Depo-Provera shot.
File photo

When many women turned to Depo-Provera as a convenient birth control option, they had no idea it might carry life-altering risks. After years of injections, some began experiencing troubling symptoms — persistent headaches, ear pain, blurry vision, and balance problems. What they didn't know at the time was that Depo-Provera had been linked to meningioma brain tumors, which develop in the protective membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord.

The troubling part? Lawsuits now claim the manufacturer had known about this risk for decades yet failed to warn patients clearly. For countless women, the connection between their symptoms and their birth control was never explained — until much later, when they learned that the medication they trusted may have played a role in their diagnosis.

Had the risks been made clear from the start, many might have chosen a different path. But without proper warnings, how could they have known?

As lawsuits against the maker of Depo-Provera continue to grow, a disturbing reality comes into focus: the manufacturer is accused of being aware of a serious, life-threatening risk but failing to fully inform the very people who relied on their product.

Women remain uninformed

In the United States, more than 65% of women aged 15-49 rely on some form of birth control to manage their reproductive health. Nearly a quarter of them have used Depo-Provera. Among Hispanic and Black women, that number climbs even higher — to 27.2% and 41.2%, respectively.

Approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1992, Depo-Provera delivers an injectable form of birth control containing the hormone medroxyprogesterone acetate, a synthetic progestin in a water-based solution. It quickly became popular because of its ease of use, particularly among women who found daily oral contraceptives inconvenient.

Yet, as early as 1983, studies published in the European Journal of Cancer & Clinical Oncology linked progesterone (the natural form of the hormone) to meningiomas. Research published in 2011 (British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology) showed a positive correlation between a progestin medication and meningioma's incidence and growth rate.

More research followed supporting these results, but the manufacturer said nothing to consumers.

Then came the alarming “Roland” study. Published in the British Medical Journal in March 2024 revealing that prolonged use of Depo-Provera — 12 months or more — was associated with a 5.6-fold increase in the risk of developing a meningioma.

The manufacturer updated its product labels in the European Union and the United Kingdom to warn about the possible connection. Labels in the United States, however, still lack such warnings, leaving millions of American women in the dark.

How do serious health risks remain secret?

How do millions of women find themselves at risk of a brain tumor after decades of taking what was supposed to be a trusted medication?

It seems to boil down to profits over public health. The pharmaceutical company chose to conceal the risks while pocketing millions of dollars in sales.

As women become more aware of the Roland study, they are stepping forward to hold the manufacturer accountable. The litigation is expected to continue growing in the coming months.

Lawsuits may result in compensation, but they can’t erase the damage that’s been done. We must prevent critical health risks from being buried beneath corporate interests by enacting changes that ensure plain-language warnings, better communication between doctors and patients, and corporate accountability from pharmaceutical companies.

In the meantime, consumers can take proactive measures to protect themselves. When prescribed *any* new medication, ask about all potential risks, and do your research to find studies, patient experiences, and even lawsuits that may reveal hidden dangers. The system must do a

better job of protecting patients. Until that happens, patients must do all they can to safeguard their health.

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