

Conclusions

Compared with many drugs, the product development of a new contraceptive is expensive and relatively high risk. It is unlikely that the pattern of contraceptive use will change radically in the next 10 years. No one method will be suitable for everyone, and individuals' preferences will probably change through their reproductive life. In the next five years more sophisticated systems for the delivery of steroid hormones, through or under the skin and into the uterus, will extend the range of options available. In five to 10 years new steroid antagonists such as antiprogesterins will replace some current contraceptive methods, such as gestogen only pills, and probably lead to new approaches like a "once a month" pill. By 10-15 years, the dream of an effective safe male pill will probably become a reality, shifting the burden of responsibility for contraception more equally between men and women. Only then will women have truly achieved "the fifth freedom"—freedom from the burden of excessive fertility.²⁰

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When I use a word ... That's show business

The names of drugs are usually coined from words related to their chemical structures. For example, the full chemical name for a popular analgesic is *N*-acetyl-*para*-aminophenol. Simpler to use the British Approved Name, paracetamol, which is just a contraction of the full name, as is acetaminophen, the United States Adopted Name.

But some drug names have unusual origins. For instance, a few are derived from the entertainment business.

P Sensi and his colleagues at Lepetit Research Laboratories in Milan had the habit of giving new compounds nicknames, later substituting names that would be acceptable to scientific journals. Matamycin, for example (*Antibiot Chemother* 1959;9:76), was originally nicknamed Mata Hari. And when in 1957 they isolated a group of antibiotics from the fungus *Streptomyces mediterranei* (now called *Nocardia mediterranea*) they called them rifamycins, from the title of the French gangster film, *Rififi*, directed by Jules Dassin (1955). Rifampicin was the *N*-amino-*N'*-methylpiperazine (AMP) derivative—hence rif-amp-icin. Rififi is French argot for trouble, and the original title of the film was *Du Rififi Chez les Hommes*, which we might nowadays translate as *Men Behaving Badly*. The chief feature of the film was the half hour documentary-like sequence during which a bank robbery is staged in total silence. The startling effect of the return of sound to the screen was harnessed again by Dassin in another account of an unsuccessful heist, *Topkapi* (1964), based on Eric Ambler's novel *The Light of Day*.

Then there is opera. In 1977 several novel compounds were isolated from a substance known as bohemic acid complex III. Their discoverers named them marcellomycin, musettamycin, rudolphomycin, mimimycin, collinemycin, alcindoromycin, and schaumardimycin. Another compound was called bohemiamine. Recall the plot of Puccini's opera *La Bohème*. Rodolfo and Marcello, poet and painter respectively, trying to work in their bitterly cold garret, are joined by their fellow lodgers, Colline (a philosopher) and Schaunard (a musician). Rodolfo meets a neighbour, Mimi, with whom he falls in love. Marcello's former lover, Musetta, gets rid of her ageing admirer, Alcindoro, and rejoins Marcello, but they later separate again. Rodolfo leaves Mimi too, but they are reunited just before she dies. Unfortunately, ignoring the symmetry of the plot, mimimycin is the 10 epimer of marcellomycin and collinemycin the 10 epimer of musettamycin—not the proper pairings at all. The spelling of rudolphomycin is also curious. In Henri Murger's original stories, *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*, the poet's name is Rodolphe, while Puccini, being Italian, spelt the name Rodolfo. Perhaps the discoverers of these compounds (*J Nat Prod* 1980;43:242-58 and 1984;47:698-701) just made a mistake.

These -mycins are all anthracycline antibiotics, effective against cancers. But I wonder if they might have cured Mimi of her tuberculosis.

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