

Controversy circles new contraceptive

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steroid, which works by adhering to hormone receptors in the uterus that accept progesterone.

Because RU 486 blocks the action of progesterone — the substance that prepares the uterine lining for implantation of the fertilized egg — the body sheds the uterine lining, something it would normally do during a menstrual cycle. Within 48 hours after taking the drug, women experience uterine bleeding and the embryo is expelled.

So far, the drug has been tested clinically in several countries — including France, Sweden, China and the United States — with few side effects. A study at the University of Paris-Sud reported in The New England Journal of Medicine, showed that out of 100 women volunteers who were less than a month pregnant, 85 women aborted within four days. All 15 volunteers who failed to abort experienced some uterine bleeding.

Dr. Daniel Mashiell Jr., who is testing RU 486 at the University of Southern California under the auspices of the non-profit Population Council, discovered that the drug triggers abortion in 90 percent of women who take it within six weeks of becoming pregnant.

Combining RU 486 with small amounts of prostaglandins, biological compounds that cause the uterus to contract and expel the embryo should result in a close to 100 percent success rate, researchers contend.

There is even some hope that it can be taken as a once-a-month pill, a few days before the expected onset of menses. This would allow women to terminate a pregnancy without knowing they were pregnant.

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has studied the drug's contraceptive potential on female monkeys. The females were caged with males and given the compound on the 25th day of their cycle. All the monkeys that received the drug did not become pregnant or experience side effects, said an NICHD spokesperson.

BECAUSE the drug has only been tested on humans for five years, its long-term effects are unknown.

Nevertheless, RU 486 will be on the market in France by early 1988, Baulieu said. "It will be in the states within five years," he predicted.

But Baulieu's projections are optimistic, countered a Federal Drug Administration spokesperson. Drug development takes 8-10 years, the spokesperson noted.

The drug is currently being developed in conjunction with the private multinational pharmaceutical industry. RU 486 is named after the drug company Roussel-Uclaf, a French affiliate of Hoechst-Roussel pharmaceuticals in Switzerland.

The United States government is prohibited from funding research on abortifacients. The Population Council received FDA approval for their research because they met the "legal requirements for conducting clinical tests of a new drug on humans," according to an FDA spokesperson.

ON CAPITOL Hill, efforts to restrict the FDA paperwork that allows such testing have been thwarted. Congressmen Dornan tried twice — unsuccessfully — to introduce an amendment to the Health and Human Services Appropriations bill that would have banned research on the abortifacient.

In an August letter to his colleagues, he wrote: "There is no doubt that some in this country want us to swallow this death pill with closed eyes. Already some have joined with Baulieu and are trying to cloak its abortifacient nature by calling it a contraceptive."

The proponents of abortion want to replace the clinically proven guilt suffered by women who undergo abortion with the moral uncertainty of self-deception. Imagine, with the death pill, the taking of a pre-born life will be as easy and as trivial as taking aspirin.

Although his own attempts were aborted, the congressman intends to work with the Department of Health and Human Services to draft regulations against allowing the processing of paperwork for studies on abortifacients, said Jerry Gideon, senior legislative assistant to Dornan. He's also working with Sen. Gordon Humphrey, R-N.H., to introduce a similar amendment on the Senate floor, Gideon noted.

The current political climate is

not conducive to advances in contraceptive research, contends Dr. Tyrer of Planned Parenthood.

"I don't think the term contraception will find much support in our country," she said. "People want to know whether they're taking an abortifacient or contraceptive."

"Under the present administration, the chances for FDA approval of RU 486 (as an abortifacient) are unlikely. But I'm hoping that future administrations will be more amenable to funding of research for contraception."

A COMBINATION of factors — the political tide and liability concerns — has kept major U.S. drug companies from testing or marketing such compounds.

Upjohn Co., based in Kalamazoo, shut down its fertility research program in 1985 because of a "regulatory climate adverse to reproductive drugs and an increasing amount of litigation over these drugs," according to an issue paper drafted by the company.

However, Upjohn does distribute two abortifacients — *Prostin E2*, a suppository for use between the 12th and 20th weeks of gestation, and *Prostin XM*, an intramuscular injection for terminating pregnancy between the 13th and 20th weeks of gestation. Both are sold to selected hospitals.

The company refutes the notion that a National Right to Life boycott was a major factor in its decision to stop research on abortifacients.

"It was not related to the boycott," said Jessy Bradford, a spokeswoman.

Members of the National Right to Life Committee, an umbrella organization of anti-abortion groups, boycotted Upjohn's over-the-counter products 1983-85.

Baulieu concedes that major U.S. drug companies will probably stay away from RU 486 because of pressure from pro-life groups.

"But some small companies will (test and market) it," he said.

"Whether they like it or not, abortion is a fact of human behavior," he added. "After France, Sweden, England and China have it, RU 486 will necessarily come to the United States."



Researchers studying the drug at Oakland University are (left to right) Dr. Makoto Nakao, Cliff Hurd, Dr. Naomie Eliezer and Dr. Virinder Moudgil.

Scientists study new drug

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sickness drug DES during pregnancy.

"Women used it in the 1950s and 1960s when the basic research was still raw," Moudgil said. "Their babies showed signs of uterine and cervical cancer at a young age."

Moudgil says he doesn't foresee a day when he'll want to conduct clinical trials on humans.

"We are not working on humans or animals that require abortion. We pick up tissue (from the slaughter house) that's going to be thrown away."

"I have immense respect for anti-abortionists."

mal and human life."

BESIDES studying its effects as an abortifacient, Moudgil also is researching its other applications.

• Treating breast cancer. "It is known that 30 percent of all reported breast cancers are known to carry hormone-dependent tumors," Moudgil said. "And 60-80 percent respond to hormonal therapy."

• Treating Cushing's Syndrome. RU 486 reduces the high levels of cortisone that cause various symptoms in this debilitating bone disease. Moudgil is studying the drug's effect on rat livers. "This is a good model to understand how it could eliminate or decrease cortisone effects."

Although Moudgil is not researching these applications, RU 486 is instrumental in restarting menstrual cycles for women who have stopped menstruating because of factors other than pregnancy.

Ironically, it also may save a pregnant woman's life. "RU 486 speeds up delivery in cases where the labor may be delayed or potentially endanger the lives of the baby and mother," Moudgil said.

Crafts and services to go up for auction

Mayfair Co-op Nursery School of Farmington Hills will be hosting a craft and service auction beginning at 7 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 7, in Temple Kol Ami, 5085 Walnut Lake Road, West Bloomfield. Almost 100 items will be auctioned during the evening, ranging from hand-made craft items and donated goods from local community businesses to personal services from Mayfair members.

Both a silent auction, utilizing written bids, and open bidding conducted by an auctioneer, will occur. Silent auction bidding and a preview period for open items will be from 7-

8 p.m. Open bidding will begin promptly at 8 p.m.

Wine and hors d'oeuvres will be served throughout the evening. A \$3 admission price also includes a chance in the evening's raffle for dinner for two at a local restaurant and a night's lodging at the Berkshire Hotel in Southfield.

Temple Kol Ami is on Walnut Lake Road between Farmington and Drake Road. Tickets will be available at the door.

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