

Drug testing: Female guinea pigs need not apply

MONTREAL (CUP)—When pharmaceutical companies and drug research companies recruit on Canadian campuses for students to test their drugs on, they don't want any women. Women's bodies mess up the nice, clean curves on their graphs.

Unfortunately, once on the market, some of these drugs can seriously harm women's bodies.

Bio-Research Laboratories Ltd. in Quebec is one of Canada's largest drug research companies. It tests new drugs, and improvements on old ones on about 1,000 Quebec students each year. They advertise for subjects on every university and CEGEP campus in Montreal. "Wanted: Young men, 18 years or over, weigh between 145-185 pounds, in good health," the ads read. This represents the "normal population" according to Angela Hergle, a clinical researcher at the Bio-Research labs.

"Unfortunately we don't take

women," she said, "The main reason is that women's metabolism is very different. Researchers want to restrict the variables in their studies as much as possible so all the subjects are within a certain range."

Hergle said researchers don't want to know if a drug affects men and women differently. They want to be able to chart a graph at the end of the study which will show if the drug is good for the "general population".

"It causes a lot of headaches to use women," she said.

Women have periods and fluctuating hormone levels and different combinations of hormones, which makes studies more difficult, said Hergle. For some, these differences are precisely why women should be included in studies of drugs.

Women and girls receive 73 per cent of all tranquilizers prescriptions, even though they are under-represented or not represented at all in the clinical trial of the drugs,

according to Dr. Elaine Borins, a Toronto psychiatrist who spoke at the International Conference on the Status of Girls held in Montreal last month.

Girls and young women are particularly sensitive to very serious side effects of tranquilizers, said Borins.

But research biases, she said, mean that those effects are not discovered until the drug is available on the market and girls are taking it.

Bio-Research is contracted by Canadian pharmaceutical companies to test drugs for quality before they go on the market. They test all commercial drugs from aspirins, to anti-hypertensives to tranquilizers and Valium. The rules for research are laid down by the Canadian Food and Drug Administration, the final authority on the safety and quality of drugs sold in Canada.

Hergle said when women complain to their doctors, that the Valium they are taking is making

them extremely drowsy, doctors will reduce the dosage. Hergle said dosages would be reduced for people taking a drug if they had a smaller body size than the test group.

Hergle admitted, however, that body size was not the only factor which could make a difference

between men's and women's responses to a drug.

"It's an internationally accepted rule (not to use women)," said Hergle, "It would be an enormous step to use women. The goals now are efficiency and all clinical and market researchers do exactly what we do."

No tuition in Quebec?

MONTREAL (CUP)—The Quebec New Democratic Party is campaigning to abolish tuition fees if it is elected Dec. 2. It has adopted Concordia University student Pete Wheeland's Post Obligatory Education Tax (POET) proposal.

Under the proposed POET system students would not pay tuition, but would pay a special tax one year after finding their first job. The tax would be up to three per cent of the student's gross earnings, paid for three years for every one year spent in a post-secondary institution. POET would eliminate loans and create an all-bursary system.

The NDP provincial council met with Concordia students last month to discuss the NDP's platform.

In a new conference after the meeting, Party leader Jean-Paul Harney did not discuss POET, but instead gave five major points of the NDP platform: better living conditions for people in Quebec, creation of employment, equal rights for women, peace and disarmament, and self-determination and sovereignty for the people of Quebec.

He said he means sovereignty within confederation.

"We would not put forward a policy that doesn't fit with the federal NDP's position, but we want a constitution written by Quebec for Quebecers. The question of sovereignty belongs to the people, not to a couple of notables like Johnson and Bourassa," he said.



Photo: Neil Stout

MP and best-selling author **Jean Chretien** reportedly autographs over 1,000 copies of his book *Straight from the Heart* everyday. But at a recent autograph session at Greenwood's books last week, we counted only one request for the former cabinet minister and Liberal leadership candidate to sign a t-shirt. The other 300 Chretien fans settled for the usual "Bonjour" on the book's frontispiece.

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Corrections: Volunteers needed to provide counselling and support to probationers. Training and staff support provided.

Children: Centre for mentally and physically disabled children needs help at swimming, class instruction, audio-visual presentations and in the office. The Zoo needs volunteers to show presentations and lead tours for children. Tutors needed for French reading, English as a second language, special problems of slow learners, computer skills and library instruction. "Study buddies" needed in Westmount area to help students improve study habits. A 14-year-old south Edmonton boy needs a role model and companion.

Seniors — A city day centre needs volunteers to write a history and serve on the board of directors. Senior programs in Westmount and south Edmonton need volunteers to plan and carry out activities. City nursing homes need volunteers to visit one-to-one in the brain injury unit, help with swimming programs, and lend in hand with library and clerical work.

One-to-one — A south Edmonton woman with multiple sclerosis needs help with shopping and outings; a 94-year-old lady in Beverly needs a volunteer to be with her a few hours a week so her daughter may have free time; a diabetic man and his mentally handicapped son need help from a volunteer who will cook for them occasionally.

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