

*Private Members' Business*

The third effect of Bill C-279 would be to ban absolutely the specific category of breast implants that contain a degradable ingredient such as silicone that is likely to cause the presence in the body of a substance that the Food and Drugs Act prohibits.

It seems strange that the current regulations are not sufficient to protect women from substances that are prohibited by legislation, but it is clear from the evidence presented by groups such as I know/*Je sais*, that they are not.

Perhaps the most important effect that Bill C-279 will have is the indirect influence it will exert on the breast prosthesis manufacturers. When they realize that the Government of Canada is finally taking this issue seriously, they will be forced to make sure that any breast implant they make for distribution in Canada will have to be unequivocally safe.

I first introduced Bill C-279 in this House almost two years ago, in June 1990. At that time, the government already had overwhelming evidence there was a problem with the regulations as they stood. One of Health and Welfare's own scientists, Dr. Pierre Blais, had spoken out about the many dangers of the Meme implant as early as 1986. Yet two years later, this government still is waffling.

For anyone who is unfamiliar with the Meme implant, it is a breast prosthesis composed of a silicon gel contained inside a polyurethane foam covering. This is the same foam that you will find inside furniture cushions, carburetors or air conditioners, except in this case it is inside women.

Rather than removing the Meme implant from the market, the Minister of National Health and Welfare chose to remove Dr. Blais from the department. Dr. Blais was forced to resign in 1989.

In May 1989, the government commissioned a review of the safety of the Meme implant. The doctor commissioned to carry out the work, Dr. Carolyn Kerrigan, was a plastic surgeon from Montreal who used the implants herself. She implanted them in her patients and benefited from the Meme's continued presence on the market. This was not a very unbiased study, was it? There is no conflict of interest here.

Her results were: "There is inadequate evidence in the experimental and clinical literature to implicate polyurethane covered implants as initiators of human cancer".

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"Inadequate evidence" that they were dangerous? How about adequate evidence that they were safe? In any case, cancer is certainly not the only health risk to humans. We now know that these implants can cause a variety of diseases from arthritis to kidney failure to failure of the auto-immune system as well as a series of ailments including persistent headaches, muscular inflammation, circulation disorders, back pains and skin diseases.

Five full years after Dr. Blais' first warnings, in April 1991, the Meme was removed from the market. Last month, Dow Corning, a major American manufacturer of silicone gel implants, released evidence that it has known the dangers of silicone gel implants for over two decades. That is more than 20 years.

The mandate of Health and Welfare Canada is to protect Canadians from health hazards. It is not enough for the Minister of National Health and Welfare merely to accept the evidence it is given by the manufacturer. It does not take a rocket scientist to see the conflict of interest that is involved here.

On January 8 of this year, in response to the actions of the food and drug administration of the United States, the government asked manufacturers to stop distributing silicon gel implants in Canada. Over a month later, on February 17, an advisory committee was established to study silicone gel implants. It could be months before the study is complete.

I am glad that the government is finally acknowledging that a problem exists. Why is it taking so long? Obviously there is a problem with the legislation as well as with the process.

Even now, rather than proceeding cautiously, the government is forging ahead with plans to speed up the approval of new products. Drug reviews are being contracted out to private consultants. Many of these consultants are being paid to conduct research for the very same companies that are being investigated.

The government policy at the moment seems to be "better sorry than safe". It is not enough to have biased opinions from plastic surgeons saying there is insufficient evidence to show that a product is dangerous. Canadian