

The Poisoning of America: The Rise of 'Mystery' Illnesses Including Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Fibromyalgia, and Gulf War Syndrome

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As the Twin Towers fell, the world watched in disbelief and shock. When the horror of it had finally hit us, a myriad of emotions washed over each of us. In the end, all we could do was to pick up the pieces, learn from our mistakes, and try to make our world a safer place. Perhaps from it all we learned that the institutions that we trust to protect and serve us, in fact need all of us to help them perform the difficult jobs that we demand of them. Our intelligence and law enforcement institutions need us, our financial institutions need us, and as we will unfortunately come to learn, our health care institutions also need us.

Before I begin to unveil the silent enemy that has been busy causing more destruction than we will ever truly be able to comprehend, I must confess that I am not a doctor. I have no medical background whatsoever. So I cannot in any way establish as scientific fact what I'm about to share with all of you. While I believe the following to be true based upon my own personal experience, along with careful deduction based on hundreds of personal stories and information that I have found from a host of sources, medical authorities nearly everywhere will undoubtedly argue otherwise. At least, they will initially. I have no doubt though that when all is said and done, the voice of the people who have been living with so many "mysterious ailments" for so long will finally be heard. And when that happens I believe the medical community as we now know it will be turned upside down, and I would truly hope in the end, changed for the better.

At the heart of this horrific story lies a group of antibiotics called the fluoroquinolones. Among the more common of these medications are: ciprofloxacin (Cipro), levofloxacin (Levaquin), norfloxacin (Noroxin), ofloxacin (Floxin), and trovafloxacin (Trovan). Serving an important role as a last line of defense against bacterial infections, these incredibly potent antibiotics have certainly done a tremendous amount of good. But then again, at what cost? Surely these are drugs that were never intended to be handed out like candy to everyone complaining of a sore throat, but in fact they were, just as they continue to be to this day. These are medications so potent that they can not only destroy most bacterial infections in no time, but they can also do permanent damage to the user in no time as well.

The most widely prescribed of these medications is Cipro, invented in 1983, and which as we all came to learn in the wake of 9/11 is so powerful that it can take on the likes of a biological

weapon such as anthrax. It is in fact the most widely prescribed antibiotic in the world. And it is, like many of the other fluoroquinolones on the market, perceived to be safe enough for widespread use. Unfortunately this perception is just about as wrong as wrong can be. The reason for this miscalculation is that the side effects associated with this particular type of medication actually behaves much differently than the way researchers expect them to. Side effects to medications are typically at their worst at the time they are taken. If side effects are noticed, then the use is terminated, and typically the resulting symptoms disappear over some period of time. This unfortunately is not the case with fluoroquinolones however. The side effects for these medications can last indefinitely, and often times are actually at their worst long after the medication has been stopped. Hence patients don't even associate the medication with their symptoms at all much of the time, as frequently the symptoms weren't even noticeable during the course of treatment. This type of effect is much less common, and is normally associated with medications that researchers can find in measurable amounts in the body at some point after treatment has ceased. But since fluoroquinolones are not found in measurable amounts very long after treatment has ceased, their side effects are labeled "bizarre" by those few doctors who understand this effect.

The Center for Disease Control was obviously a little shocked to find an abnormally high incidence of side effects in those people they monitored who were in close enough in proximity to the anthrax letters that they ended up taking Cipro as a precaution. The Palm Beach Post recently reported that the CDC found that 57% of the members of that particular group reported some side effects while actually taking their medication, 16% with side effects severe enough to seek medical attention. This is just SLIGHTLY higher than the maker of Cipro reports is normal. But then, this is obviously a group of people who were watched very closely by the medical profession. As a result of their surprising finding though, the CDC was concerned enough to immediately begin a two year investigation to study of the long-term effects of Cipro. In any event, there are a few doctors who have been trying to tell us that the side effects are in fact much more prevalent than we have been led to believe. In a Wall Street Journal article from October of 2001 for example, Dr. David Flockhart, Chief of Clinical Pharmacology at the Indiana University School of Medicine, reported that he believed up to one third of all patients taking a fluoroquinolone would experience a "severe psychiatric side effect." But unfortunately such warnings typically fall on mostly deaf ears.

According to the Palm Beach Post article, Cipro alone has been prescribed over 280 million times since it was first introduced. So, where are all the people who are suffering side effects from these medications if this is such a problem you ask? Well if we follow the clues, they will unfortunately lead us down a rather stunning road that is almost impossible to comprehend how it has been missed. If we begin by looking at this particular group of people that the CDC has been monitoring, and from what we know from the patients who have experienced known side effects from fluoroquinolones, it becomes clear that the more anxiety and stress that one is under at the time they take the medication, the higher the incidence of side effects will be. Why would this be? Well, the reason for this is almost certainly related to muscle tension, as the CDC will hopefully come to learn over the course of its investigation. The more stress your muscles are under at the time you take the medication, the more likely you are to experience noticeable side effects. To understand this, one need simply look to the history these antibiotics.

In late 1970's researchers attempting to make the already rather potent group of antibiotics known as quinolones even more potent, decided to attach fluoride to the quinolone group. Fluoride unfortunately is a known poison to the human body, more toxic than lead, and in fact nearly as toxic as arsenic. Fluoride exposure, among other things, disrupts the synthesis of collagen and leads to the breakdown of collagen in the muscles, tendons, cartilage, bones, kidneys, lungs, and skin. This in fact is the reason that muscle tension appears to play such an important role in the propensity of people to have more noticeable side effects while taking these drugs if they are under greater amounts of stress at the time. Already tense muscles are made even more tense as the muscles begin to breakdown.

Unbeknownst to many Americans I think, including myself until quite recently, almost half of Gulf War veterans experienced what we have come to term "Gulf War Syndrome." Years later many of those veterans were diagnosed with the mysterious conditions we have come to term Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. While we don't for sure what medications those soldiers were given, as they themselves don't even know, we do know the military stocked up on Cipro during the time of the Gulf War, and we can certainly make an educated guess that there was a good chance that the military had reason to suspect that biological agents such as anthrax would be used against them. And obviously we can all imagine that soldiers are under more stress than the average person, particular during times of war. But then, what do we know of these two relatively new conditions, Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, which are often so difficult to diagnose that most physicians will only make such a diagnosis by the process of elimination?

We know that millions of Americans have actually been diagnosed with these conditions despite the long winding road that it generally takes for such a diagnosis. And in a rather eerie coincidence, we know that there are in fact several other conditions, which we have also become increasingly familiar with, that also share many of those very same symptoms. Such conditions include Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Syndrome, Chronic Myofascial Pain Syndrome, and Peripheral Neuropathy. While some of the people who suffer from these latter conditions do appear to have a known cause, many experience these conditions for reasons physicians don't understand. Yet, almost unbelievably, all of these conditions appear to produce very nearly the same symptoms that are found in people who experience side effects from fluoroquinolones.

Is it possible that all of these different conditions include millions of people who have actually been misdiagnosed and are actually experiencing long-term side effects from the fluoroquinolones? Well, we do know that there are a number of different fluoroquinolones on the market, and that there are obviously a lot of variations on how each person carries their own normal amount of the muscle tension. Therefore depending on each individual, is it possible that each of us might respond in slightly different ways to a drug that has the net effect of causing our muscles to tense up even more? Not only possible, but highly likely one would imagine. Of course the potency level and the amount of time that individuals are exposed to these toxic medications also accounts for a huge range in the amount and severity of their symptoms.

While some people do experience immediate and severe side effects right away, probably based

on either their increased level of muscle tension, or even possibly on their genetic susceptibility to these drugs, the majority of people undoubtedly respond in very similar ways. Therefore, most of the people who fall into those more severe side effect categories probably generally tend to have greater exposure, higher potency levels, or are under more stress than the average person. Gulf War veterans, like those people the CDC has been monitoring for anthrax exposure, along with millions of their fellow citizens have all, it would seem from the circumstantial evidence and deductive reasoning, experienced those more severe side effects. Yet does this mean that those people who have had lesser exposure levels, or have lower normal stress levels at the time they take these medications haven't had any symptoms at all?

The answer to this question unfortunately may well be almost beyond imagination, and yet in hindsight is all too obvious. For we are still missing the biggest group of all affected by such drugs. The group in which muscle stiffness and related problems are normally put first. The group in which most of the people whose conditions eventually worsen to the point that they are eventually diagnosed with one of the more severe related conditions, in fact ALL tend to begin their long battles. The catchall condition for such mysterious ailments, stress and anxiety disorders.

While there can be no doubt that there are certainly millions of people who do have stress and anxiety related problems that are not a result of these medications, is the fact that there has been such a growth in these conditions over the past twenty years just a coincidence? "These are simply stressful times," we've all been told time and time again. Apparently more stressful than the Vietnam era, or the World War II era, or the Great Depression era, or at any time during our entire history. Nevermind that the standard of living has actually increased during that same time period, or that most of us can now watch war from the safety of our living rooms. The fact is, it would certainly seem, we have all been blinded from the horrible truth. The truth, that the most widely prescribed antibiotics in the world have in fact been creating chronic health problems across our entire nation.

Probably the only scientific way to really be able to prove the validity of such an seemingly outrageous claim, would be to see if there was a cause-effect relationship to those who took such an antibiotic and then, some months later even, began experiencing "stress and anxiety" related symptoms. Of course the less scientific method would be to just ask people who suffer such symptoms if they think there is in fact such a relationship. Many people may come to the quick realization that all their health problems began to deteriorate during, or in the months following, the taking of one of these drugs. But unfortunately in the state of the "modern" health care system, doctors normally only have a few short minutes for such patients. This perhaps is much of the reason why this epidemic has gone almost completely undetected by much of the medical community over the past twenty years. Only a handful of doctors in the nation really have been able to see this problem, and they still have yet to get our full attention. Will the CDC come to understand the full scope of this disaster as they continue to investigate those people who they've been monitoring so closely related to the anthrax scare of 2001, or will this group of people also slowly get put into one of these growing categories of victims of the fluoroquinolones?

Even patients who have experienced immediate and severe enough side effects to KNOW that

their symptoms were caused by a fluoroquinolone usually are not successful in convincing their doctors. This is because most doctors tend to rely on the information provided to them by the pharmaceutical companies, and therefore signed off on by the FDA, regarding the stated side effects to all drugs. It is a near impossible task to convince a doctor that they are not being told the full story. Just ask the group of people on the Internet who refer to themselves as “Floxies.” This is a quickly growing group of people who experienced an immediate enough side effect that they made the connection to this type of drug. Naturally this is also a relatively pissed-off group of people, because not only are most unable to convince their doctors of what they know, but they’re also just a little ticked that no one ever told them that their side effects to these toxic drugs could be permanent. Just like all the other conditions mentioned previously their symptoms often include: joint pain, muscle stiffness/aches, tendon pain, dizziness, disorientation, burning and tingling sensations, numbness, diarrhea, sensory sensitivities, and brain fog. Naturally, some have even worse symptoms, while others don’t experience nearly as many.

Across all of these various conditions though, one finds that anti-stress and anxiety-related drugs generally tend to help reduce or even eliminate symptoms in many cases. This is probably because the muscles, tendons, and joints generally tend to be the first areas affected in the majority of people, and even many of the more worrisome symptoms tend to, at least initially, be related to severe muscle tension.

Fluoride’s toxic effects, however, actually extend far beyond simply the disruption of the synthesis of collagen in the body. Fluoride can also have severe and sometimes permanent neurological effects, which can be reflected in side effects such as seizures at times, or equally serious but much less outwardly obvious related problems (i.e. Attention Deficit Disorder, Alzheimer’s, etc.). Fluoride can also cause great damage to the body’s immune system by depleting the energy reserves and the ability of white blood cells to properly destroy foreign agents, and by inhibiting antibody formation in the blood (i.e. causing increased susceptibility to illness, and possibly even Lupus). Fluoride can cause gastrointestinal problems, depress thyroid activity, and cause cardiovascular problems (perhaps due to its effect on the heart “muscle”). All these known side effects leads one to the all too real conclusion that the disorders listed already may very well be only part of all the damage that the fluoroquinolones have done over the years.

While the FDA undoubtedly believes that a toxin such as fluoride is a necessary evil in the world in which we live, it would certainly appear they have made a grave miscalculation in turning a blind eye to its effects on the human body. The short and long-term effects of all drugs and the components which make them up should be measured and fully understood, especially if they are to be used for non-life threatening conditions. Of course, the FDA is far from alone in the blame for allowing this horrific tragedy to occur. We are all ultimately responsible when we allow our institutions, which we have created to protect and serve us, to act so irresponsibly. Our whole health care system has in fact failed us, and yet, we can never forget that we have also failed ourselves.

The Gulf War veterans were never told exactly what medications they were given, despite the fact that many believed that their health problems actually stemmed from the “preventative

drugs” that they took. In ignoring the health of our Gulf War veterans who bravely fought to help contain one of the great evils of our world, ironically it would seem, we have in fact been ignoring another one of the great evils of our world. In the end, perhaps our soldiers will once again be the key to restoring the freedom and way of life that our nation values so dearly.

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