

Dr. Goldman's Book Reviews

AGELESS

The naked truth about bioidentical hormones

By

SUZANNE SOMERS

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General Notes:

Although in 2005 Suzanne Somers came out with another book called *Slim & Sexy forever*, *Ageless* is her follow up book to *The Sexy Years*, her initial book on bioidentical hormones. As with *The Sexy Years*, this book presents a series of interviews with doctors and other health practitioners on the subjects of aging, hormone supplementation, life style and various therapies. In addition to the interviews, Suzanne Somers adds her own comments about her personal experiences. This book is larger than *The Sexy Years* with more interviews and a broader reach. I am afraid that in many ways it is a step over the edge. In some ways she moves forward, while in other ways she has gone over a cliff.

Somers first hormone Guru was Diana Schwarzbein, MD an endocrinologist and primarily an expert on diabetes management. Dr. Schwarzbein used to work with an anthropologist named T.S. Wiley. They have had a falling out and Suzanne Somers followed Wiley. Although I disagree with some points of Dr. Schwarzbein's management, (**which I suspect for Somers may have resulted in an unnecessary hysterectomy**), I feel that T. S. Wiley is totally misguided. As a result, readers of *Ageless* are liable to end up with more misinformation than readers of *The Sexy Years*. This is too bad. **I feel that Suzanne Somers truly desires to do the right thing for her readers.**

In November 2006, Suzanne Somers was on the Larry King show with Schwarzbein, Wiley, Erica Schwarz, M.D., and Utian Wolf, M.D. the Chairman and past President of the North American Menopause Society. Wiley and Schwarzbein obviously now hate each other and their interactions were bitter and nasty. Dr. Wolf was deprecating bioidentical hormones using the same arguments that I listened to for the five days of the annual meeting of NAMS that I attended in Nashville in October 2006. Watching that TV program, I felt that Suzanne Somers was the only totally honest person on the show. Anything she writes will sell and make her money; she doesn't have to lie or make things up. I believe that she is trying to gather the best information she can. Unfortunately, in following T. S. Wiley, I believe that she has gone astray.

Because the book is a series of interviews, I will have to review a number of the chapters separately, as the accuracy of the information varies widely depending on who is interviewed.

Introductions:

In general, the three introductory chapters make many good points but I would like to differ in several areas.

In *The Sexy Years*, **Schwarzbein** states that Progesterone leads to gestational diabetes (diabetes of pregnancy). She is wrong. The placenta makes a hormone called Human Placental Lactogen (HPL). It is HPL that increases insulin resistance and can lead to gestational diabetes. Because of this error, Schwarzbein only uses progesterone for ten days of the month and in small doses. She also tends to use larger doses of estrogen. I believe that this can lead to estrogen excess. Schwarzbein states that she wants all her menopausal patients to have full periods. I disagree. I believe that I use less estrogen and more progesterone and that I use progesterone for more days in a row. Most of my patients have little or no withdrawal bleeding on the days that they stop their progesterone. Suzanne Somers states that she developed "severe hyperplasia". (page 20) She was bleeding irregularly and went on to have a hysterectomy to stop the bleeding. It is my belief that with less estrogen and using progesterone for longer periods of time, the hyperplasia would have been reversed or not have occurred at all. Somers is unaware of this.

T. S. Wiley is even further off track. For one thing, she states that Americans are the sickest people on the planet. This is wildly untrue. Large areas of Africa and South Asia are rampant with malaria, aids and many other parasitic and infectious disease that kills off most women before they get anywhere near menopause. Also, the notion that "the importance of ovulation in the human female body is to let the brain know I was well, healthy and reproductive." (p22) is a fantasy. For most of human history, most women were either pregnant or breast-feeding most of their lives. They would get a few periods and then become pregnant again. Pregnancy is heavily progesterone dominated and breast-feeding is a low hormone state. On page 24 Somers states, "those original birth control pills we took are the same synthetic hormones that the Woman's Health Initiative 2002 warned us to stop taking." This is wrong also. The synthetic estrogens and progestins in Prempro from the WHI differ markedly from any birth control pill. There is no reason to believe that the side effects of the Provera in Prempro are true for the birth control progestins and in many cases we know that the effects are different.

Most of the arguments Somers makes in this section of the book come from T.S. Wiley. Virtually all the basic statements of fact are incorrect, leading to erroneous conclusions. It is really too bad. Careful, measured use of bioidentical hormones have many benefits. Uzzi Reese, who was interviewed in *The Sexy Years* is so much more knowledgeable than Wiley. Somers is following the wrong Guru.

There is much good information in the next hundred pages, but again, there are crazy T. S. Wiley ideas. She proposes the concept that the brain thinks you are useless if you are not reproductive and will try to kill you off. Her solution is to fool the brain with hormones so it will think you are still young. This is strange stuff and has very little to do with physiology. Wiley promotes a "rhythmic HRT to trick the brain into believing that we are still functioning, reproductive beings." She gives no convincing reasons that

any of the ideas she promotes are scientifically valid. I believe that she has come up with a very complicated solution to a nonexistent problem.

Chapter 7, Dr. Taguchi, breast cancer:

Although she makes some good points, she believes that low estrogen levels raise breast cancer risk. In fact, it is estrogen excess. Taguchi does not seem to appreciate the importance of natural Progesterone.

Chapter 8, Dr. Darrow, Bone health:

His points about the dangers of soft drinks are very important. I don't know if taking anti-inflammatory drugs will really "drive the pain further into tissue", but it might dull the pain and allow further repeated injury.

Chapter 9, Dr. Hall on hormones:

Many of Wiley's inaccuracies are repeated here. Maintaining normal stomach acid levels is important but her female hormone theories are mostly wrong.

Chapter 11, T. S. Wiley:

I said it already.

Chapters 12-15, on men:

There is much good here. I could comment on a few small points, but mostly Dr. Shippen is very knowledgeable. His own book is good, also.

Part Three, sex, sleep and stress:

Much is good here also but I disagree about mammograms. (p251) It may be true that 15% of tumors are missed but that means that 85% are seen. No screening test is perfect but mammograms are the best we currently have.

Much of what they say about stress is true, except one thing. Many other places in the world and most of past history was much more stressful than America today, **and most people died young.** Old age is only a problem if you live to see it.

Part Four, Detoxification:

There is much real here but also some hocus-pocus. Again, in the past people lived in very toxic environments. Imagine heating and cooking over an open fire in the middle of your house. The constant smoke was terrible. Fireplaces and chimneys were not invented until the 1600s. Arsenic was sprayed in the US to keep bugs off of apples. Raw sewage ran in the streets in most cities. Some environments are worse now, but most are better.

Dr. Robert Greene has his own book called *Perfect Hormone Balance*. For some reason he hates progesterone and loves birth control pills. He also removes ovaries to solve hormone imbalance in young women.

Part Five, Supplements:

My review is mixed here, also. Much is good. As we age out bodies need extra amounts of many nutrients. If we tried to take only the whole foods, the total calories would be way too much. In prior times, it was impossible to get enough of all the nutrients and nearly everyone was sick most of the time. This, by the way, is true of most animals in the wild. Most are sick most of the time. Supplements are very important.

I have two points, though:

Human Growth Hormone injections are very expensive. There is much money to be made and it is all cash. No insurance will pay for older adults to get these shots. Growth hormone is hard to measure and most measures are indirect. The data is scarce. I don't know what the final answer will be but for now, growth hormone is only for the rich.

Somers is getting supplement intravenous infusions. I am sure this is also very expensive and time consuming. She can afford both the money and the time. The program she is on could cost tens of thousands of dollars a year if, in fact, she actually is paying. Her book is a great infomercial and, I am sure, helps the business of the doctors she includes. I doubt that the doctors are directly paying her, but she may be getting some of her medical care at reduced cost. It would be difficult for most people to afford the program she is on.

Final:

I think Suzanne Somers is a terrific person. I believe that she genuinely wishes to promote only the best information in her books. I believe that most of the doctors she interviews are sincere and try to do the best for their patients. This field is still in its early stages. I change my medical and hormone practice all the time as I try new things and learn more from reading, speaking to other doctors, take courses, and learn from my patients. When reading any material, keep in mind that it may not be correct. In this life, we are all learning and must choose our path based on the information we have at hand.

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