

DRUGS & SUPERFLUOUS HAIR

INTRODUCTION TO THE *INTERNATIONAL HAIR ROUTE DRUG CHART*® 2004 UPDATE

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THE NUMBER of brand-name drugs available today by prescription worldwide is in the hundreds of thousands. In North America alone there are close to 250,000, and new ones are being introduced every month. The recent superfluity of new drug offerings in the U.S.A. — where the majority of pharmaceutical companies are based — is due in part to acceleration in the Food and Drug Administration's new-drug approval rate, which has increased significantly in the past decade. In the early 1990s, the FDA approved only 25-30 prescription drugs a year. By 2003 that number had more than doubled.

All of this helped the pharmaceutical industry continue its reign as the most profitable industry in the annual *Fortune 500* list. The top 10 U.S. drug makers increased profits by 33 percent and topped all three of the Magazine's measures of profitability in 2001.

Today, prescription drugs kill more people (an estimated 100,000) each year than all automobile and airplane accidents combined. Thomas J. Moore, senior fellow at George Washington University's Center for Health Policy Research, in Washington, D.C., and author of *Prescription for Disaster: The Hidden Dangers in Your Medicine Cabinet*, warns that "every year in the U.S., about one million people annually (one in four over a lifetime) are hospitalized due to an adverse effect of a prescription drug."

When the first *International Hair Route Drug Chart*® was published in August 1998, there were 834 brand names on the "List of Proprietary Drugs Which Name Hirsutism as a Possible Adverse Effect." When an update of the Drug Chart was published in June 2001, there were 966

brand name drugs listed — an increase of 16 percent.

Thanks mostly to a reduction in the number of corticosteroid preparations, these numbers are now coming down. In the 2004 Update of the Drug Chart there are only 726 drug names that name hirsutism as a possible adverse side effect: In three years, different manufacturers have deleted an astonishing 634 brand names from the old 2001 list. Even with 406 new names added, this is an overall drop of 240 brands.

The dark side of this picture is the percentage of newly developed, *non-hormonal* drugs that appear on the Drug Chart each year. Many of these products frequently fall into a category that this writer refers to as "Ugly Pills" — medications with treatment side effects that are as bad (or worse) than the ailment they're supposed to cure. If there is good news here, it is that these new drugs — many of them anticonvulsants, antidepressants and antipsychotics — are of a type that electrologists will encounter very rarely in their businesses, if at all.

In the 2001 Drug Chart there were listed less than half a dozen antidepressant drugs of the type known to have hirsutism as a side effect: In this 2004 Update the number of antidepressants has escalated to 24 — among which are found venlafaxine hydrochloride, paroxetine hydrochloride, bupropion hydrochloride, and fluoxetine hydrochloride (Prozac). Each being a powerful drug prescribed for the treatment of major depression. Hirsutism is just one of many objectionable side effects caused by antipsychotic drugs like risperidone and olanzapine (Zyprexa), prescribed for patients with manic depression or

schizophrenia.

The drug donepezil hydrochloride, prescribed for Alzheimer-type dementia, also lists unwanted hair growth as an adverse side effect. Hypertrichosis is noted as a side effect of pergolide mesylate, as is selegiline hydrochloride (Eldepryl) — both of them are drugs for use in the treatment of Parkinson's disease.

The number of anticonvulsants listed in the 2004 Drug Chart update, has more than doubled since 2001. Most of the antiepileptics, which can be useful in the treatment of epilepsy, contain drugs that name 'hypertrichosis' or 'hirsutism' as a possible adverse reaction: phenytoin, carbamazepine, lamotrigine, and zonisamide are just a sampling of the drugs that fall into this category.

Minoxidil, which is used for kidney failure patients and the treatment of severe high blood pressure, and finasteride for the treatment of alopecia, are also known to be hair growth stimulants. A small number of drug formulations containing diazoxide, for the treatment of excess glucose in the blood due to hyperinsulinism, have the possible side effect of "hairiness of the lanugo type, mainly on the forehead, back and limbs."

About a dozen drugs in the list are administered to patients who almost certainly will not be visiting an electrologist for permanent hair removal. Included among these are the recombinant DNA origin interferon beta-1b immunomodulator drugs developed for use in cases of multiple sclerosis, and porfimer sodium (Photofrin), a photosensitizing agent used in photodynamic therapy involving tumors — at the enormously depressing cost of \$2,740.70 \$US per 75 mg injection. *℞*