Fact or Fiction?

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Polio Vaccine and Cancer

Over 70 companies have had to file for bankruptcy because of the impact of the tidal wave of asbestos lawsuits filed throughout the U.S.[1] With this much litigation a cadre of folks of questionable character jump into the fray. The work of Joseph Gitlin and his colleagues provides a recent example. They sent 492 X-rays that had been used in asbestos cases to six independent radiologists for evaluation. The radiologists had not been told beforehand that the X-rays were from litigation. In the court cases, 96% of these X-rays had been claimed by "professional physician witnesses" to show evidence of abnormalities that might have been caused by asbestos lung damage. Guess how many abnormalities the independent radiologists found.? Would you believe only 4.5%—20 fold fewer than the professional asbestos witnesses.[2] With this fresh in mind, when I subsequently read that at least 20 percent of mesothelioma victims (a fatal cancer of the membrane that lines the lungs) report no asbestos exposure, and only 10 percent of people who have had heavy exposure to asbestos ever develop mesothelioma,[3] I initially thought this was another case of people trying to work the system for financial gain. Not So!

There are a number of experiments that suggest that a monkey virus labeled SV40 may be another factor in the tumors. But here's the real kicker. The SV40 virus came from the polio vaccine used during the 1950s and early 1960s to inoculate millions of people.

Contaminated Vaccine

Debbie Bookchin and Jim Schumacher report in their fascinating book, *The Virus and the Vaccine*, "For nine years, from 1954 to 1963, almost every dose of polio vaccine produced in the world was contaminated with a cancer causing simian virus. In one of the biggest blunders in medical history, nearly half the American population—about one hundred million people—and millions more in Canada and Europe were administered this widely contaminated vaccine. When scientists discovered the virus in 1960, they named it SV40—an innocent sounding, almost antiseptic appellation, except that SV stands for simian virus, and 40 designates that it was the fortieth such virus discovered." They add, "The virus came from the monkey kidneys on which the polio vaccine was produced. At the time, scientists developing the polio vaccine and other vaccines knew that the monkey kidneys they were using were often contaminated with unwanted simian viruses, but it was assumed they were inconsequential. SV40 proved them wrong."[4]

Other Monkey Viruses

SV40 isn't the only virus associated with monkeys. The Marburg virus is part of a family of viruses that include Ebola. A 1967 outbreak in Europe was from a batch of African green monkeys shipped from Uganda that were to be used for the production of polio vaccine.[5] And don't forget about HIV. Somewhere along the way HIV leapt from monkeys to human beings but exactly how is still unknown.[4]

Recent studies provide strong evidence that the virus is for real and not a figment of the imagination of a few maverick scientists. Bookchin and Schumacher report, "Between 1997 and early 2003, more than 25 new studies were published demonstrating the presence of SV40 in human mesotheliomas; sixteen others found the virus in brain, bone, and various other cancers, as well as in the kidneys and peripheral blood. Since 1997, study of the simian virus has become a global phenomenon. As of 2003, researchers had found SV40 in human tumors in China, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Spain, Portugal, France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, England, Scotland, Wales, the United States, Canada, and Brazil."[6] A March 9, 2002 report in the medical journal Lancet provides evidence that contaminated polio vaccine is responsible for up to half of the 55,000 non-Hodgkin's lymphoma cases per year.[7]

It took until January 2000, three decades after many European vaccine regulators concluded that monkey kidneys were unsafe, and long after Canadian counterparts had reached the same conclusion, before America's vaccine regulators finally made available a polio vaccine that was not grown on fresh monkey kidney tissues."[8]

Summary

Vaccines are one of modern medicine's most important innovations. Not only do they prevent early childhood disease, they are a critical public health tool, having rid the world of scourges like smallpox, and having reduced the number of deaths from childhood illnesses like measles dramatically. However, sometimes vaccines contain trace amounts of toxic unknowns such as residue from the manufacturing process, or preservatives designed to extend their shelf life. Sometimes they can be contaminated with living organisms, bacteria and viruses that may have escaped from the animal tissues that are used during the manufacturing of any vaccines.[9]

One reason the danger of SV40 did not get more attention was that asbestos was thought to cause mesothelioma. This made it simple for environmentalists, for workers and for the asbestos abatement industry, since they had someone to blame and be held responsible. Blaming some of the problem on a non-asbestos related issue was unattractive to lawyers, to litigation, and to the asbestos removal industry.[10]

Continued on page 19

At another installation, a highly anticipated trivalent chromium alternative to hexavalent chrome plating was being installed. Part of the start up consisted of dummy electrolyzing to condition the electrolyte. Upon test plating, the chrome deposit was pewter in appearance, not like the blue white it was supposed to be. It was found to be another incidence of reverse bussing to the plating tank rectifier. Unfortunately, the new bath was so grossly contaminated with metallic contamination it had to be replaced with a new make up. This resulted in plating the desired chrome deposit.

Carbon filtration is very important to maintain clarity of plating solutions and remove organic contaminants. If the equipment is properly serviced or used, the benefits of proper filtration will not be achieved. I have experienced many situations where filtration equipment was inoperable due to broken or worn parts. A lack of filtration can result in dull plating, roughness, and poor ductility. Sometimes the obvious corrective approach is by passed in favor of adding more brighteners or other additives to the plating bath. This in turn exacerbates or worsens the plating condition.

There have also been problems related to lack of equipment maintenance. How can a trickle filter return possibly benefit the purification turnover of a 1,000-gallon nickel bath?

Rectifiers can be considered the nerve center of the plating application. Without current the parts don't get plated. Without proper current, the parts will not be plated to the required specification. Rectifiers need to be serviced on a regular basis by capable personnel. If not, the obvious problems will occur.

One very expensive problem comes to mind. The decorative chrome deposit was hazy and white washed. The bath analysis was in range. All other baths, rinses, were also in good order. The wrong approach occurred where sulfuric acid and barium carbonate additions were made. Next, panic stepped in as rinses were dumped and the chrome bath was replaced with a new make up, all to no avail. Finally some one mentioned the rectifier. A call was placed to the manufacturer. Within five minutes the serviceman accurately diagnosed the problem with his oscilloscope, AC ripple.

If corrosion is to be minimized and the quality service life of parts improved, attention to every portion of the finishing process must be in focus. The examples given highlight problems and failures that adversely affected the condition of the incoming and finished parts. Some instances were obvious, while others were more complicated, requiring intuition and patience. In itself, corrosion is a major challenge to progress. That is why the metal finishing industry is so important to all facets of global activity. ***P&SF***

Fact or Fiction

Continued from page 16

Another reason is that the links between SV40 and human cancer took a long time to define and breakthroughs in molecular biology made the job more realistic in later decades. Perhaps today our regulators and researchers are more knowledgeable and willing to act quickly. A positive example is the tainted 2004 flu vaccine that was pulled off the market when it was discovered that it contained the same bacteria used in germ-warfare tests.[11]

Malignant mesothelioma is a relatively rare cancer, Striking and killing about 2,500 Americans a year and thousands more people in other parts of the world. No debate the disease is associated with exposure to asbestos, but as is now clear this is not true for all cases of mesothelioma and there is strong evidence that SV40 plays a role for some victims. You might argue that this is a small price to pay for eliminating polio. Before immunization, an average of 16,000 cases of paralytic polio were reported in the U.S. each year, and about 1,800 people per year died of this disease. There were no reported cases in the U.S. in 1999.[12] However, the unfortunate part of all this is that it could have been stopped much earlier. A safer vaccine was available long before early 2000 but was not made available for the reasons mentioned above. Dr. Michele Carbone, who has spent most of his career investigating SV40 says, "It is one of the most potent human carcinogens that we know." With all the wailing and gnashing of teeth we hear about all our potent synthetic chemicals why haven't we heard more about SV40?

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