

INTRODUCTION

SEBM SYMPOSIUM: Estrogen Replacement Therapy: Benefits, Risks and Future Outlook

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Estrogen replacement therapy is becoming increasingly popular among postmenopausal women as a means to combat the symptoms and health risks associated with menopause. While the evidence suggesting that estrogens produce a strong protective effect against osteoporosis, deteriorating cognition, and heart disease continues to accumulate, concerns regarding increased cancer risk remain. Furthermore, our knowledge of the pharmacology and composition of conjugated estrogens (the popular brand of estrogens used) is less than adequate. Although the conjugated estrogens have been in use for the past 50 years, it is not clear (a) what the function of an individual estrogen is and (b) why it is necessary to administer such complicated mixtures to women without knowing the role of each estrogen? Alternatives to estrogen therapy continue to be explored to minimize the possible risks of cancer. In this proceedings, these topics are covered. Starting with a overview of estrogen therapy, followed by pharmacology of conjugated estrogens, the role of estrogens in cognition and cardioprotection, and then risk of breast cancer. Finally, future outlook in terms of alternatives to estrogen therapy and novel selective estrogen receptor modulators is discussed.