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# New Rx can make new problems

BY SARAH BALDAUF  
 Premium Health News Service

Tom Nesi, author of the new book "Poison Pills: The Untold Story of the Vioxx Drug Scandal" wants you to know what you're getting into when you pop a newly approved, heavily marketed prescription drug.

A longtime director of public affairs at the pharmaceutical company Bristol-Myers Squibb, Nesi has more than 30 years' experience in medical communications and strategy. Now a writer and consultant, he comes off as no shill for the industry he once served.

His book focuses on the cautionary tale of Vioxx, the prescription painkiller that was pulled from the market after doctors belatedly realized that it caused heart, blood and kidney problems.

**You say the most expensive drug you can take is a free sample. How is that?**  
 They're very seductive — they're free. Merck distributed 17 million samples



Women need to be particularly careful when using new prescription drugs, which can affect reproduction. (ISTOCKPHOTO)

I would say the larger the marketing campaign, the more you should use caution. I would also say if there are good drugs in a category — in a type of illness that you suffer from — that have been out there for a while, there's no reason not to use those first.

**How long should a drug be on the market before you try it?**

I don't think it hurts to wait a few years. If you are in acute need, if you're just suffering horrible pain, you've tried everything under the sun and you need a new drug, well, that's entirely different than if you're satisfied. I would say, if you're satisfied with your current therapy, stay with it.

**You caution women, in particular, to find out about a new drug's safety before taking it.**

We know that some drugs interfere with reproduction. Any woman who is planning to get pregnant, or who potentially could get pregnant, should definitely discuss that with her doctor.

**How often do doctors actually recommend their patients stop taking a prescription that works for them and start a newer drug instead?**

It happens all the time. There are whole huge campaigns based on what they call switching behavior.

to 25,000 physicians and 375,000 patients. The problem is that if you've been doing fine on a 20-cent pill, you get the free sample for a month or two, then you have to go to the drugstore to fill the prescription and then it costs you \$3 a pill.

small population. It's also tested on a very select population. Drug companies don't go out to try to find the sickest patients to test their drugs on. (With older drugs), not only is there more data but more usage experience. Doctors know how to use it — they become familiar with it.

**You argue that in the context of pharmaceuticals, new is not always better. Why?**

It's extremely important that people understand that, as extensively as a drug is tested before it's approved (by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration), it's still tested on a very

**As a veteran drug marketer, you warn consumers to beware of huge marketing campaigns for new drugs, urging people to ask their doctors for proof that new drugs are superior to older ones.**

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Preregistration required and will be available online at **www.thegcf.org**.

Sponsored by the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation and made possible through support of the NYU Cancer Institute and the Ovarian Research Cancer Fund.



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