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November 3, 1969

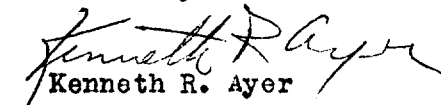
Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Stanford University

Dear Dr. Lederberg,

In your column appearing in today's Stanford Daily you make reference to thalidomide as a mutagenic chemical. I recall seeing a reference to thalidomide in an article on heart transplants, though unfortunately I can't recall the source. The comment was made in this article that thalidomide did not ~~cause~~ the deformities attributed to it. Rather, it suppressed ~~the~~ the natural rejection mechanisms which in its absence would have caused a spontaneous abortion of the deformed fetus. This rejection suppressant quality, according to this article, is currently being used to good advantage in heart transplant cases.

Being completely a layman in the matter, I have no idea whether this is the case in fact. The author of the article, which probably appeared in a popular magazine, may easily have been misinformed. At any rate, I'm sure that you'll be interested in checking into the matter for your own information and would appreciate hearing your resolution of the matter.

Sincerely,


Kenneth R. Ayer
Department of Anthropology
Stanford

To be precise, I did not say that thalidomide was mutagenic, for it is not known to cause changes in DNA (genes), but rather on development.

I am sure that thalidomide is not widely used as an immunosuppressant, but some similar drugs (mercaptopurine) are also teratogenic. The speculation ~~of~~ you mention cannot be contradicted, but is not very appealing.

Without a more explicit text, it is hard for me to comment in more detail.



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