



The Drug Trial: Nancy Olivieri and the Science Scandal that Rocked the Hospital for Sick Children

Miriam Shuchman

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Winner of the Writers' Trust of Canada's Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing and the Canadian Science Writers' Association's Science in Society Book Award.

Poison-pen letters, possible medical misconduct and a swirl of competing accusations that led to two inquiries – the Olivieri affair ended careers and shook the international research establishment. A riveting anatomy of Canada's most controversial drug trial, by the medical journalist who helped break the story.

In August 1998, a medical scandal erupted in the national and international media whose consequences still reverberate. A charismatic young doctor named Nancy Olivieri, working with young people who suffered from a rare blood disorder, stated that she had discovered serious problems with an experimental drug manufactured by Canada's largest drug company, Apotex. Though her research contract required her to remain silent, she decided she had no choice but to warn the patients enrolled in her trials. Apotex retaliated by cancelling her research and slamming her reputation. In the aftermath, Olivieri became a whistleblower applauded in academia and the media for standing up to powerful corporate interests.

The Olivieri affair spawned two inquiries and multiple lawsuits, but the full story of Canada's biggest science scandal has never been told – until now. In the hands of psychiatrist and medical journalist Miriam Shuchman, the debacle over the pill called L1 is revealed as a modern morality play in which every crack in the system of scientific research, corporate financing and peer review stands out in stark relief.

By talking with the people whom both Olivieri and Apotex wanted to heal – the young men and women struggling to have normal lives despite debilitating treatment – Shuchman also brings us the moving story of the toll on patients' health when battles break out among the physicians and researchers aiming to heal them.

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