

Little Pink Pill

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Growing up, I used to love watching 'The Golden Girls' with my mom. Many teenage boys would never admit such a thing, but it was a funny show.

One of my favorite characters was Blanche Devereaux, the oversexed roommate portrayed by Rue McClanahan. Sadly, Rue passed away earlier this month from a stroke. In a case of life imitating art, she is survived by her sixth husband. Rue's longtime friend, Betty White, who co-starred with her on both 'The Golden Girls' and also 'Mama's Family' told reporters that Rue was a "close friend and dear friend" and that her death "hurts more than I ever thought it would."

Fresh off hosting 'Saturday Night Live,' Betty was also quoted as saying there's only one thing in her career that she's never done that she's wanted to do: Robert Redford. Apparently, the Golden Girls had no problems with their libidos.

Other women aren't quite so lucky. That's why German pharmaceutical company Boehringer Ingelheim introduced the drug flibanserin as a pill for premenopausal women who are distressed by low sexual desire. The only problem is, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration advisory panel voted 10 to 1 that flibanserin was not significantly better than a placebo, and unanimously agreed that the benefits did not outweigh side effects like dizziness, nausea and fatigue.

BI first tested flibanserin as an anti-depressant, however, the testing revealed increased sexual pleasure and desire in women as an unanticipated side effect. Because erectile dysfunction drugs, such as Levitra and Cialis, generate almost \$2 billion a year in sales, BI was quick to market flibanserin as a little pink pill or the female Viagra. The company even hired Lisa Rinna, former Playboy model, soap opera actress and 'Dancing with the Stars' contestant, as its celebrity spokeswoman to appear in online promotions. Rinna claims she suffers from female sexual dysfunction.

The clinical ailment she and other women suffer from is known as hypoactive sexual desire disorder, which was classified by the American Psychiatric Association in 2002. Critics, however, assert that pharmaceutical companies invented the disorder to sell pills. Many experts argue that many factors can contribute to decreased sexual desire in women, including stress, fatigue, low self-esteem, an unhealthy relationship or past sexual abuse. Accordingly, while male sexual dysfunction is purely mechanical and can be remedied by increasing blood flow to the genitals, female sexual dysfunction can have a myriad of causes, some or all of which may be psychological, and may not be fixed by popping a pill.

Based on many studies performed by BI using flibanserin in a sample of 30,000 U.S. women, they estimate about 43 percent of women experience sexual problems. One such randomized, double-blind study treated 1,378 premenopausal women for 24 weeks. The participants were required to be in a "stable, communicative, monogamous, heterosexual" relationship for at least one year and exhibited symptoms of sexual dysfunction disorder. Women with psychiatric and depressive disorders or those who had taken medication that might diminish or enhance sexual function were barred from the study. Many of the women in the study did show significant improvements in sexual desire and functioning compared with those on a placebo.

Because of the dollars at stake, many believe BI won't drop the issue, which is apparently great news for the oyster industry.