

LETTER to the Editor

To the Editor:

I certainly appreciate and agree with your assessment of the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), enunciated so eloquently in "If Only WHI Had Kept to its Premise—But Now it's Time for their Mea Culpa."¹ However, your religious metaphor doesn't quite encompass the entire "congregation." Maybe we should seek guidance from a different "church." The act of asking for forgiveness, redemption or absolution as a Catholic is a one-on-one endeavor that takes place in the privacy of the confessional—one sinner and one priest. While you suggest that Dr. Jacques E. Rossouw, as head of the WHI, pronounce such a mea culpa, perhaps a more Jewish perspective is warranted. You see, the Jews ask for forgiveness collectively on The Sacred Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. They seek redemption for themselves individually and as a community. While this approach does confer a certain element of anonymity, it fits here as the entire WHI community—not just Dr. Rossouw—should repent.

*The New Union Prayer Book for the Days of Awe*² details just such a request for absolution and forgiveness in the section entitled "Gates of Repentance, Failures of Truth:" to wit,

"We sin against You when we sin against ourselves....

For our failures of truth, O Lord, we ask forgiveness...

For passing judgment without knowledge of the facts, and for distorting facts to fit our theories...

For deceiving ourselves and others with half-truths..."

Yes, Dr. Jacques E. Rossouw is the titular head of the WHI, and has long held the belief (before there were any WHI data) that hormone therapy should not be used to prevent heart disease.³ Yes, his anti-scientific-method pre-conclusion⁴ that "our main job at the time was to turn around the prevailing notion that hormones would be useful for long-term prevention of heart disease...was a worthy objective which we achieved" smacks precisely of "...distorting facts to fit our theories..."² However, he is not alone. Many others, including the broader print and broadcast media are, in at least equal measure, complicit⁵ in these "Failures of Truth." While I applaud those WHI investigators who are finally emerging to voice their concern and frustration with being excluded from the July 2002 media-grabbing, media-distorting WHI publication,⁶ they now must find their own absolution and path to redemption.

An entire generation of women, their partners and their families suffer unnecessarily for their collective sins.

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Dr. Utian's response:

I appreciate your response and am delighted to have struck a chord. Whatever the denomination, I hope the National Institutes of Health and WHI writers have taken note and seek absolution for their transgressions.

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Editor-in-Chief