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Barry Castleman Comments - 2023 Nov. Italian Rai3
public TV documentary on talc in cosmetics features
Johnson & Johnson - English translation

a brief introduction at minute 00.00.22

the dangers of asbestos were known century ago.

Translation starts at 1 minute 14 after the presentation of the program.

5 past 9, welcome. And you see the topics of this issue [...]

Good morning. [...]

We're going to start with an ad. When we were very, very tiny, very young, in particular, I would suggest that you listen very very carefully to the words.

"Baby talc teaches you to be delicate in the delicate parts. Stops irritations and any reddening".

Now talc, talc, how many times have you used it? How many times your parents, your mothers, your fathers used it with you, or your brothers and sisters? Because it was very common to have it in the house. For many years we had these beautiful ads showing us it was used in particular on children and the fact that you should use talc on the delicate parts of your baby's body.

But some scientists and some courts have decided that there is a problem here and you can see it summarized: by some of these headlines: what is happening? The largest multinational of the sector is sentenced to pay billions worth of compensation in the US. Why? because some consumers accuse them of having induced them to use talc in their intimate parts especially when they were children and that this may have caused the onset of cancer.

But – and it is a very big but - the scientific community has not spoken in one voice about talc. There are some people who say no one has got the final word one way or the other and this leaves us with a big question. That is to say that with talc there might be asbestos, the one which in mines is very often closer to the talc that is being extracted, that is being mined. Talc is not just used as powder. Look at this table and you will see all the uses it has: you can see where we use talc in face powder, in chewing gums, in pills, in paints, in ceramics, that is to say we use talc everywhere. Last summer the Netherlands asked the European Commission to include talc in the list of cancer-causing substances. And in the US there is a problem.

You won't have heard people often talking about this problem, very few times, so we thought it was about time that we should hear voices on this. And you'll see all there is that is to be known,

Sit back comfortably and you will hear all there is we know, and all there is that can be known. In the US [and now we can go] there's been a harsh verdict against Johnson & Johnson of the talc manufacturers and the presence of asbestos in talc produced by the multinational. Doubts have been around for many a year. However, the scientific community has never agreed on whether talc in itself causes cancer. No definitive answer.

Nevertheless, last year the multinational Johnson & Johnson decided to set aside an very large figure, 61 billion US dollar for possible compensation to be paid out in future. It is therefore normal to ask, if you don't think that cancer is caused by talc, why would you set aside 61 billion?

Prof Mario Bussani, Comparative law lecturer (chair) at the University of Trent (Italy)

- Johnson & Johnson had, has had many court cases: asbestos was found in it [talc] and it has caused ovarian cancer or pleural mesothelioma. Several trials that have settled.

...there have been many cases

- For example, five victims a couple of years again obtained 2 billion, 121 million, and other trials have led to 190 million in compensation, and there are others. For instance, there is a case where the 40,000 victims, again, where the Johnson and John have offered, 9 billion but plaintiffs may not accept

So this is why Johnson and Johnson have set aside 61 billion. Have there been verdicts against Johnson and Johnson that have ascertained a link of cause effect between the use of talc and the onset of cancers,

- All the ones I mentioned.

You might be asking yourself, why should talc cause cancer? It's not talc in itself, but asbestos it may contain.

Dr Elena Belluso, Chair of Environmental Mineralogy, University of Turin (Italy)

- This is talcum powder, it is what is sold.

The talcum powder we buy in fact is a sort of crushed rock

- Yes, this is a rock, and it's virtually only talc, which does not contain asbestos fibres. It was mined in a valley in Piedmont. While this one, and it is absolutely closed and sealed, is a fragment of a rock that contains talc, but also asbestos. Tremolite, this rock contains both talc and asbestos.

The question becomes, how does asbestos end up in talc? Does anyone put it in, or is it naturally there when you mine it?

- It's a mineral, found in nature it is extracted or mined. In some cases, it's pure talc, but in other cases, there can also be one, two, and sometimes three species or types of asbestos, which are contaminants in the sense that they weren't deliberately added, but they are minerals that formed together with talc inside the rock.

So we could say that in some mines, the talc mined may contain asbestos, while others, while other talc, does not contain it.

- Quite right

So it is possible that asbestos is found in the talcum powder we buy

- The answer is yes, because in the mines where talc is mined & asbestos together, even though not deliberately mixed with talc, the final product may contain asbestos.

People have looked for Asbestos in talc, both sold as talcum powder and in the mines: Dr. Sala is showing us a Canadian study on the talc extracted from mines sold throughout the world

Dr Orietta Sala, former Hygiene specialist from the Reggio Emilia Arpa (the environmental agency of Reggio Emilia –Italy) :

-For instance this is talc from New York, Vermont and from Georgia, and for example the Georgia one contains 10 % of tremolite and therefore not a negligible amount.

Tremolite, asbestos?

- Yes asbestos

So asbestos is present in some of the talc mines. You just have to look for it.

(speaker) Johnson & Johnson will have to pay nearly \$5 billion to 22 women who developed ovarian cancer because of the presence of asbestos in talc produced by them or manufactured by the multinational company.

The trials also saw Dr. Barry Castleman, who is a toxicologist, an expert witness.

- My role in the trials against Johnson & Johnson and other talc producers was that I witnessed that the information on the dangers linked to talc and on the asbestos talc were known since the last century.

Dr. Barry Castleman is considered one of the key expert witness also because he was one of the first people who raised the problem in 1971. This is the letter where 52 years ago he was asking about information of the presence of asbestos in talc.

- I was 24, I was a student and I wrote to the Johnson and Johnson asking them what they did to eliminate the asbestos from their talc. It was an innocent question. I was just a young student and they said that they had no asbestos in their talc. We have analyzed our talc, we've analyzed it and there was no asbestos they said.

Pity that 40 years later they in some trials there were other documents

- These documents also showed that the Johnson and Johnson had sent samples of its talc to external labs both in the 1970s and in the 1990s and that the labs had said that some of the samples did contain a certain amount of asbestos.

Johnson and Johnson still denies that asbestos was ever found.

- Yes it is true Johnson and Johnson has never publicly accepted the presence of asbestos in his products.

One of the first who got worried about what was happening in the U.S. and was concerned what happened to the Italian consumers.

Enzo Ferrara, a member of Medicina Democratica and of the Association of Exposed to Asbestos (Associazione esposti all'amianto)

- When this happened in the U.S. with Johnson and Johnson, we started to gather information on what was happening in our country.

And what is the situation in our country?

- Well unfortunately it's not so simple because very little care is taken to ascertain where the talc sold in Italy comes from and also because there is limited concern about it, We are very concerned because, in our opinion, the methods which are used, are not accurate, sensitive enough to identify asbestos in the talcum powder marketed

*We have to be ethically correct because we like to be, we like to give information. Currently, there is no single position on the scientific community. There is no definitive decision. We want to say this very clearly. What we're discussing now, giving you some bearings is if there are risks and how these risks can get. You will then make the informed choice. It is up to science because there are people who study and have been studying for 60 years. We can't give their answers. This said, I would like to welcome all our guests. Here we have our colleague who's written most on this and who works for Il salvagente, **Lorenzo Misuraca** and **Professor Bruno Vincenzo** from the Rome Medical Campus, oncologist, whom I thanks for his time, and from Milan **Dr Elena Accorsi**, cosmetic specialist and popularizer. And then a friend, we can say, a friend to see him because he's one of the faces of popularization, especially amongst the youngsters, Geopop director **Andrea Moccia**. And let us start immediately from what we know for certain. Let's see the table.*

These are the most recent verdicts against the U.S. on talcs. They only concern Johnson and Johnson. In 2023, they had an agreement 9 billion and a settlement to close 40,000 cases, 2021, 29 billion to a woman and 2020, 2.2 billion for having caused a variant cancer to five minutes.

This is a fact. We also contacted Johnson and Johnson as we thought it was right because but they sent a written statement and I'm going to read it so you all know about it:

Experts and doctors from all the world say that cosmetic talc is safe. The plaintiffs' lawyers are causing a great damage to the cancer victims concerning convincing them that cosmetic cancer is what caused it. It is time for these plaintiffs lawyers to stop causing trouble and enable victims to distinguish truth from false. Then we asked them why the courts are giving these big settlements and they said' we are ready to challenge each case, but were we to do so we would need hundreds or thousands of years .

So basically they say we prefer to pay nine billion dollars in compensation rather than going to court. Why? Because it would be more expensive in legal point of view that that does not mean we're guilty and from a technical point of view that's true.

But this doesn't sound right to a person who's not an expert: It is as if they say it's safe and does not cause cancer but in the mean time they're going to pay compensation. How do you put the two together?

- LM- It's very strange because they're saying that we're going to spend nine billion dollars to save a bit of time. The strategy is like the one Johnson and Johnson followed with opioids and on the drugs that are at the center of many of the overdose related deaths. But in this case there's another thing which we're not convinced of that is the same the last year. Another Johnson & Johnson move again on talc is that they have tried to hive off another company, the sort of bad company where they put all the debts & liabilities. They filed for bankruptcy because with that And they're the ones that would take all the responsibility.

Can I you explain this to people who don't know this? What happens?

The Johnson and Johnson has set aside \$61 billion, which is a figure possibly only found in tobacco or cigarettes in US cases for future possible compensation to avoid to have this enormous debt. And they created a separate company. So my question is, why do you set aside \$61 billion if you're sure that your product does not cause the disease?

- Well, yes, that's obvious. And if you're so sure do you implement this very aggressive policy, and you're going to take to court all the scientists that associate the risk of cancer to talc? This is what they're doing in the States. If any scientist talks about this possible connection between talc and cancer, he or she is immediately sued by J&J.

It has a name and technically it is also done to journalists. Well and now I'm going to speak to Dr. Elena Accorsi, who is the one who best experts about consumption of talc to see the order of magnitude of this controversy. I wish to stress this it is an ongoing debate. This is a controversy. Talc, is it still used a lot with women and children who seem to be the most frail in the chain according to the verdict, they seem to be the most exposed, the weakest links?

- EA - Good morning to you all. Two things. First of all, talc is used in cosmetic products and it is powder, it is not a hundred percent talc, but it consists of a series of different powders and then they are put together. Cosmetic talc is a safe talc because it has to be, it has to undergo the tests pursuant regulation 1223 of the Italian legislation which is the strictest as far as cosmetics in the framework of European regulation too.

So the talc that comes to our cosmetics in Italy, if it is from a known source is safe, but we're not worried about say having asbestos contaminated talc, I am saying it in a very or anything like that said very simply, straightforwardly.

- EA - Absolutely talc for the final consumers is not dangerous, it must be pure. That is to say, it must have a very high level of purity and it must remain within the standards that are very strict.

Thank you very much and now let us talk a second about the mines, the talc and asbestos mines. Are they close by are they? Can they contain asbestos? But before that, I would like to show you a table again. Number seven. So, what do cancer specialists oncologists say? It's talc containing asbestos is as Dr. Accorsi was saying. There is no certain scientific evidence on the relationship between the use of non-contaminated talc and ovarian cancer, but through precaution it is best to avoid talc in your genitals or in your pelvis area. The opposite of what the ads told us.. use on the delicate areas... Professor, are we okay if we use it as well?

- BV - The problem is a vaster because this message that you gave is what well represents the opinion of the scientific community. There are disagreements but it is quite clear that if there is asbestos in talc it contaminates the talc and clearly the risk of cancer is linked to the asbestos. The fact that asbestos is a powerful cancer-causing substance it is is certain.

Table 8

- BV It is also true that if we use a talc that is not contaminated in parts of the body that are not the genital area we can consider ourselves safe. However, why is there still a question mark on the safety of talc used in genital areas? Because the quality of the studies that have been carried out to identify the relationship between talc and risk of cancer is still very low.

There are very few studies..

- well, in fact there are quite a few and some significant ones but they are mainly case-control studies that is to say retrospective studies. So if a woman has developed the disease she is then asked about previous use of talc now this is very

Clear: I would like to be pragmatic and maybe this would help us and I've just got some objects here because it'll help us understand how things are used that this doll will help us so basically the problem is that if talc is contaminated and we're not saying that it's necessarily like this. You should never use it to dry the back or front of the doll it's not just the mucosa.

- BV If the talc is contaminated it must never be used because even the inhalation, especially breathing in contaminated talc, talc that contains asbestos fibers, it has a very powerful irritating activity on the epithelium on the bronchi and the pleura, so even breathing it, and this causes an increased risk,

you want to say something, the doctor there

- EA Yes I would like to add something that talc bottles, the talc to be sprinkled, it doesn't say that it must not be used on mucosa, the only warning that is present is that it should not be used on children under 3, because a very small child could breathe this, and may get a cough,

no not to question you, because every company adopts their policy on warnings, but I would like to show table 14, because we compared two big companies, one said keep away from nose and mouth of the child and avoid contact with the mucosa, the other one says newborns, when you're changing nappies it helps avoid irritations and avoids itching, so there are no warnings. Some say don't use it on the mucosa, because maybe certain type of advertising says, I don't know, avoid it..

- EA well whatever cosmetic should never be applied to the mucosa, except for example of intimate detergents, none, I for instance don't put face cream on my eye, why, because it would certainly not meant for it,

so it is not linked to a potential cancer causing, but some cosmetics should not be used on mucosa. It's very important to say this also

- EA because cosmetic talc in the talc is safe.

Let me ask Andrea Moccia, now we have a certain fact talc can create a problem only if contaminated by asbestos. How is it that in some cases asbestos ends up in the talc? Because certainly the companies don't want to put it. It has no scientific use of it. Why? No, there is no one who adds asbestos to talc.

- AM Yes, as I say, no one would add asbestos to talc. But asbestos and talc are from a geological point of view, a cousins. That is to say they are the product of a metamorphosis. They are found in metamorphic rocks. These are rocks that first were volcanic at high temperature and high pressure. They re-crystallize, they change and give rise to new minerals such as talc and very often asbestos is also there. Where there is talc, very often there is asbestos. There are some mines.

Let me just show you this map. Here, can you see it? Here you can see it. These are all the talc and asbestos mines in north and northeastern, no northwest Italy. The red one is asbestos and the yellow one is talc. Very often they're quite close by.

- Yes, they're very close by exactly because the origin, the geological origin is exactly the same. In fact, as you see, it's very interesting on the map. They're all localized up on the Alps, the mountains. This is not a coincidence because they are where the mountains are, where the great tectonic plaques met.

Andrea let me ask you: what happened to the asbestos mines? Because there was a lot of asbestos in Italy, but then it was used a lot, but now they have been closed.

- What happened? Well, in 1992, with Law 257, asbestos was banned, and therefore as a result, many of the mines have been closed, not only for that reason, but for this reason too.

So what we asked ourselves is how sure can we be sure of the provenance of the origin of talc (Table 10), because Italy doesn't produce all that talc. Most of the talc comes from India, China, Brazil, and Afghanistan. I am asking Misuraca, how much of the talc is produced here, how sure can we be of the origin of this talc? That is to say, if I buy this talc, and it says it's manufactured in Italy, can I be sure? But if it comes from India, it is not so sure,

- AMI can give you an answer in two parts. First of all, we are not ever totally certain of how strict the checks are in the mines in China, India, so on and so forth, and how rigid the legislation is there. But also, this part must be guaranteed by checks in Italy, that is to say, when it enters the European Union and Italy, it must be checked so that no asbestos enters, and as far as Italy, the people who are in charge of this are the customs office, well, obviously the Ministry of Health, but they have the checks at the customs office that have to be followed by an attestation. Now these customs may also carry out further checks. The problem is that in most cases, they just check the paperwork. They don't actually check the samples. They, or maybe every now and again, they check a sample. But it's like for food too. We are not 100 % certain that something will not be introduced clearly. The system is intended to block anything that should not arise.

Now, I'm just going to show you two aspects that are very important. Table Number 11, Johnson & Johnson is interrupting or stopping sales of talc in 2023. Too many trials. And they now suggest cornstarch. That is similar and not as concerning. While this one is a document that might seem very complicated here. It is a document with which Holland last year asked the European Union to include talc in cancerogenic substances, even the non-contaminated one. We don't know why, but what they are asking. According to Holland, it's because they consider it toxic for lungs. So we asked ourselves, why the Netherlands require something this strong? Professor, can you give us an answer?

- BVI think my answer is not clear, but we can say that at the current level of knowledge, the only study, the best one, the scientific evidence on talc, non-contaminated, obviously, we're talking about non-contaminated talc, has given negative results. So suggesting or not confirming that non-contaminated talc can be a risk with the limitations of all the epidemiological studies that are probabilistic study, but apparently they doesn't seem to be a definitive answer, especially for the ovarian cancer.

Now I would like to go back to EA because I would like to have a definitive word on this. We've understood what can cause cancer, talc with asbestos. We have to be sure that the talc that we're using is not be contaminated with asbestos. We have to check the origin of talc. Are we safe if the provenance is ascertained and sure we can be quite happy?

- EA- Well we're confusing two different things. This proposal is that of reassessing talc as a raw material. So not the talc in cosmetics, but talc as a raw material when the talc fibers have a very small size and a diameter but this is,

sorry, we're talking about the raw material, talc.

- EA Yes, the raw material, and it's in particular for the safety of the workers of the sector. So not the talc that is then sold to the consumers.

Forgive me, how is the talc that the workers mind different from the one we use in cosmetics?

- EA Well first of all the worker, for example, is who is in a mine. The mines have problems, maybe they won't have the correct ventilation. Then there might be cases in which the workers might breathe in a large amount of dust. Whether it's talc or any other dust or powder it can damage lungs. In fact, the talc that is used in cosmetics is a pure talc and it has no contamination, but secondly, it's also a talc for the use that unless you sniff it, it's really very limited exposure.

That's an example that calculates the amount of fibers that you have to unfortunately. The time is up. Now I would like to thank you all very much and maybe we'll ask the CEO to give us more time. I would like to thank all our guests. Thank you very much for the time that they have taken to be here.