

A Nightmare in Tourist Paradise

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Zanzibar, the island of dreams:

This is where Marium Forbes spent her holiday

Panic attacks, hallucinations, suicide: the malaria drug

Lariam may cause psychological damages of the worst kind.

Marium Forbes is one of those who made that experience.

Critics call it “experimenting with onsumers”.

Everything was perfect for a dream holiday on Zanzibar: a most pleasant four-star hotel at the Indian Ocean, nice guests: “I was at one of the most beautiful places on the globe,” says Forbes.

And yet she felt miserable, tired, lethargic.

“I would have been most happy to hole up. Everything had a very depressing effect on me – without any obvious reason.” Moreover, her legs were swelling, they got tired, and she had nausea all the time. “I was hardly able to eat. Still, I gained five kilos during those two weeks,” says Marium Forbes.

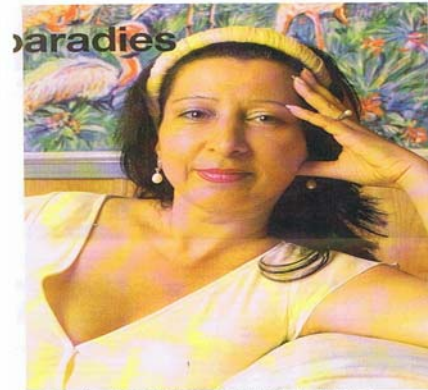
The native Englishwoman was thirty-nine years old and had been living in Rickenbach TG for ten years. Before and after her travel she had taken Mephaquin . This malaria drug is a generic of the Lariam drug produced by Roche. This malaria medicine has been known to trigger strong psychological side-effects. Expert information includes this warning, “Patients with psychological disorders should not use Mephaquin.”

Panic Attacks, Depression – and a Nervous Breakdown

Marium Forbes, too, should never have been given this drug, since she had previously suffered from depression. An expert of tropical medicine in St. Gallen had prescribed the drug nevertheless. Forbes: “I told him that I had a history of depression, but he didn’t give ear to me.” Now she knows that her severe problems are side-effects of the drug.

Her tropical doctor wrote to “Gesundheitstipp” that his patient had “not mentioned any previous sicknesses or treatments.”

Marium Forbes took the pills as prescribed – two months in total. Five days after her return she had to see her family doctor. “My legs remained swollen. I was chronically tired, depressed and could hardly concentrate.” Her doctor sent her back to the tropical expert. Forbes: “He examined me and suddenly became very tacit.” Still, he did not advise her to stop taking Mephaquin, and he gave her no explanation. Two weeks after, the Mephaquin treatment ended. But the problems persisted: panic attacks, sleeplessness, and depressive exacerbations. Two years later, another



Lariam-Opfer Marium Forbes: «Wahnsinn wurde das gefährliche Medikament zugelassen?»

stehen in einem über zwei Jahre ver-
gangenen, sich ich Mephaquin gemein-
sam hatte. Durch das Medikament
hätte ich keine Kräfte – und
kann ich meine psychische Stabi-
lisation aufrechterhalten.
Das bestätigte auch Ashby Corish,
Der britische Arzt ist einer der
besten Lariam-Kritiker weltweit. In
seiner Geschichte über Marium
Forbes kommt er zum Schluss: «Die
Einschätzung von Mephaquin hat über-
haupt nicht auf psychische Gesund-
heit geachtet.»
Heute, sieben Jahre nach ihrem
Besuch, kämpft Forbes noch immer mit
den Langzeitfolgen des Malaria-
Medikaments. «Ich bin heute mehr
der gleiche Mensch» einmal so an-
gegriffen, dass wiederkehrende
Müdigkeit hat sie gute Tage und
schlechte ab – so viel. «Tiere sind
nicht bereit, ab, wie bei einem
Computer-Parasiten, Selbst-



Gefährlich: Malaria-Mücke

vergegenwärtigen. «Hier ist es auf
ihren Momenten eine Plage gefällig,
weil ich nicht mehr das sage...
«Achtung hat Forbes nicht mehr
mit fünfundsiebzig Jahren bekommen sie
eine IV-Röhre. Das Schlimmste sei,
wie zu wissen, wie viel sie noch
leben, kann es nur auf sich selbst
wie oft eine Veränderung abgefragt,
weil es nicht, auch gar. Viele
Bekanntes verstehen das nicht.

Kapitel: Lariam könnte bewirkt nicht mehr auf den Markt

Wenn Marium Forbes über
Lariam spricht, packt sie die Zehn-
«Wahnsinn wurde dieses gefährliche
Medikament überhaupt zugelassen»,
fragt sie mit bebender Stimme.
Diese Frage stellen sich mindestens
auch Experten. Lariam hat seine
Umgänge im Wintermarkt. Die
malariaerkrankten jeden Tag Dosis
Ultraschall im Malaria. Die Welt
nutzen die Ursachen eine ägypti-
schen Forschungsprogramm. Unter
der Verantwortung gemessener
Bakterien war noch Lariam. Die
Ärzte verurteilen die Reaktion an

nervous breakdown. A psychiatrist found out that Marium Forbes is suffering from a psychological trauma – a retarded reaction to the side-effects of Mephaquin.

Only after two years does she know what caused her sufferings

Acquaintances recommend an expert in England to Mrs. Forbes. Here is where she learns where her problems came from. She remembers: “He took a look at my anamnesis. No word had yet been spoken before he stated: “Mephaquin has done this to you.” During his work as a Royal Force physician, he had treated numerous soldiers who had taken Lariam and now were suffering from similar symptoms.

“I didn’t want to believe it at first,” says Marium Forbes. “After all, more than two years had come and gone since I last took Mephaquin.” But the drug stays in the body for a very long time – and it may trigger permanent psychological diseases.

Ashley Croft confirms this. This British physician is one of the best experts on Lariam around the globe. In one expertise on Marium Forbes he concludes: “The use of Mephaquin has done permanent damage to her physical and psychological health.

Now, seven years after Zanzibar, Forbes is still struggling with the long-term effects of the malaria drug. “I am no longer the same person.” Once she is hyperactive, then she becomes lethargic. On good days, as they happen, she really slogs away – and overexerts herself. “That is when my system crashes, just like a PC.” Panic attacks, suicidal thoughts. “If I had had a gun in hand at such moments, I would be gone now,” says she.

Forbes is no longer able to work. She has been on disability benefits for the past three years and half. The worst part of it is that she can never be sure how much she can handle before it is too much for her. “I frequently have to cancel appointments because it is simply too much for me.” Many acquaintances do not understand.

Expert: Lariam would never be allowed to enter the market today

When talking about Lariam, Marium Forbes gets furious. “Why has this drug been approved at all?” she asks, her voice trembling.

Meanwhile, experts also wonder. Lariam originates from the Vietnam War. Back then, thousands of soldiers contracted malaria each day. Therefore, the U.S. military launched a gigantic research program. One of the quarter-million substances tested was Lariam. The army sold the rights for the drug to the Swiss-based pharmaceutical company Roche. Lariam was thrown onto the market in 1984.

Today Lariam would not be approved anymore, according to Ashley Croft. He recently proved that Lariam was tested only in natives who are accustomed to the malaria pathogens – not in tourists. The Swiss authorities turned a blind eye. Croft calls this “irresponsible.”

Only several years after Lariam was approved did Roche begin to test tourists – with devastating results. One study revealed that more than three quarters developed nervous or psychological problems. Most were harmless, such as headaches or bad dreams. But some participants suffered from depression or panic attacks.

According to Rudolf Stoller of the Swiss admission office Swissmedic, Lariam used to be an “important alternative” against malaria. “In the meantime,” says Stoller, “requirements for approval of a drug have actually become stricter.”

Croft’s conclusion: “All travellers who received Lariam were de facto participants in an experiment – and they had no idea.” Some died – nineteen cases have been reported by now. One of them is the 33-year-old Dutchman whose predicament has been described in the magazine “Arznei-Telegramm”: While in Madagascar, he senses an onset of Malaria, and he takes two Lariam tablets. This gets him completely off track. Panic attacks, depression and confusion ensue. Three days later he is dead. He has cut his throat with a pocket knife.

Critics assume that Lariam triggered a suicide wave

Roche’s speaker, Martina Rapp, merely wrote in reply to the charges: “Lariam has been successfully used by more than 30 million people around the globe. Even the WHO recommends it as a first choice medicine.”

Mepha, the producer of Mephaquin, is blaming Mrs. Forbes’ therapist. He should not have prescribed the Briton Mephaquin. And such side-effects, they say, also occur with other malaria drugs. “We deeply regret,” says Mepha’s CEO, Andreas Bosshard, “that our medicine has side-effects. But the benefit by far surpasses the risks.”

Critics of Lariam have a different view. The “Lariam Action USA” supposes that a suicide wave among troops in Iraq were due to Lariam: In 2003, at least 25 soldiers took their lives. The army largely discontinued the administration of Lariam – the suicide rate dropped by more than half.

Croft, being a Lieutenant Colonel himself, advises doctors against prescribing Lariam: “Until it has been established whether Lariam is sufficiently tolerable, it would be too early to recommend its use to travellers.”

Christian Egg

A Call: Have you been prescribed drugs as a malaria prophylactic? Please write us what you experience: redaktion@gesundheittipp.ch or send a letter

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