

# ***Barbara Seaman, 72, Dies; Cited Risks of the Pill***

By [Margalit Fox](#)

- March 1, 2008

Barbara Seaman, a writer and patients' rights advocate who was one of the first people to bring the issue of women's reproductive health to wide public attention, died on Wednesday at her home in Manhattan. She was 72.

The cause was lung cancer, her family said.

Ms. Seaman's first book, "The Doctors' Case Against the Pill" (P. H. Wyden), was considered groundbreaking when it was published in 1969. It argued that oral contraceptives, which then contained high doses of estrogen, posed serious, possibly fatal, health risks, and that doctors routinely failed to inform women of those risks. Among the risks Ms. Seaman listed were heart attacks, strokes, blood clots, cancer and suicidal depression.

"The Doctors' Case Against the Pill" was credited with inspiring a generation of women, who had long been discouraged by male doctors from asking too many questions, to take control of their health care. It was also credited with helping bring about Senate hearings in 1970, led by Gaylord Nelson, Democrat of Wisconsin, on the safety of oral contraceptives.

As a result of the hearings, birth control pills were required to carry a printed warning that discussed risks in general and clotting disorders in particular. These days, the pill contains far less estrogen than in the past.

For her work, Ms. Seaman was often described in the popular press as "the Ralph Nader of the pill." Her other books include "Free and Female: The Sex Life of the Contemporary Woman" (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1972); "The Greatest Experiment Ever Performed on Women: Exploding the Estrogen Myth" (Hyperion, 2003); and "Lovely Me: The Life of Jacqueline Susann" (Morrow, 1987).

With four other women, Ms. Seaman founded the National Women's Health Network, an advocacy group based in Washington, in 1975.



Barbara Seaman Credit...Henry Grossman, 2007

Barbara Ann Rosner was born in Brooklyn on Sept. 11, 1935. She earned a bachelor's degree in history from Oberlin College in 1956 and a certificate in science writing from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in 1968.

In the early 1960s, Ms. Seaman, with her husband, Dr. Gideon Seaman, wrote a column on marriage for Brides magazine; Ms. Seaman was later a columnist for Ladies' Home Journal and an editor at Family Circle. With Dr. Seaman, a psychiatrist, she wrote "Women and the Crisis in Sex Hormones" (Rawson Associates), published in 1977.

Ms. Seaman's first marriage, to Peter Marks, was annulled. Her second, to Dr. Seaman, ended in divorce, as did her third, to Milton Forman. She is survived by three children from her marriage to Dr. Seaman, Noah, Elana and Shira Seaman, all of Manhattan; two sisters, Jeri Drucker and Elaine Rosner-Jeria; her stepmother, the journalist Ruth Gruber; and four grandchildren.

Though the publication of "The Doctors' Case Against the Pill" made Ms. Seaman an enduring heroine of the women's movement, her work did not find favor everywhere. As some reviewers saw it, Ms. Seaman's passionate polemic sometimes got the better of scientific argument.

Writing in The Washington Post in 2003, Liza Mundy reviewed "The Greatest Experiment Ever Performed on Women," about the potential risks of hormone-replacement therapy:

"Seaman is a conspiracy theorist by temperament and training," Ms. Mundy wrote. "In her presentation, every drug company is working against the interests of its patients, and every journalist who fails to question this or that bad study has probably been bought off; she uses the phrase 'organized medicine' in what seems a direct echo of 'organized crime.'"

In the 1990s, Ms. Seaman also began to speak out publicly against domestic violence, from which she said she had suffered during her marriage to Mr. Forman. Though she did not identify Mr. Forman by name in the news media, court records show that in 1988 he was arrested and charged with assault after Ms. Seaman accused him of punching her in the face. The criminal case against Mr. Forman was later thrown out, Dudley Gaffin, his lawyer at the time, said in a telephone interview on Thursday.

Reached by telephone on Thursday, Mr. Forman denied having assaulted Ms. Seaman, calling the accusation of assault “a divorce tactic” on her part.

In a career that lasted four decades, Ms. Seaman would remain best known for bringing women’s health to the forefront of the national consciousness. In an interview with The New York Times in 1998, the 40th anniversary of the birth control pill, she spoke about its long history:

“It may be the most-studied pill we have,” Ms. Seaman said, “but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t need more study. There’s an awful lot we still don’t know. There’s still a yellow light of caution. It’s blinking a lot more slowly than it was, but it’s still blinking.”