

P R E S S R E L E A S E

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

San Diego, California

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NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY

The United States Attorney for the Southern District of California, William Braniff, announced today the unsealing of what may be the first federal indictment involving the distribution of genetically engineered human growth hormone. The indictment was unsealed after the arrest of William E. Cambra, Jr., a national caliber body builder and the owner of the Body & Power Health Club in Carmichael, California. According to the indictment, Cambra allegedly utilized a complex network to distribute human growth hormone and anabolic steroids to athletes throughout the country.

As detailed in the indictment, synthesized human growth hormone is utilized to treat thousands of children in the United States who suffer from a pronounced growth deficiency because the pituitary glands located at the base of their brains do not naturally secrete enough growth hormone (this treatment is available only to children as bone growth centers close after puberty and the hormone can no longer stimulate growth). Substitute growth hormone was originally obtained in a very expensive and complex procedure from the pituitary glands of human

cadavers. However, in early 1985, the FDA discovered that some of the pooled batches of the cadaver-derived growth hormone appeared to have been infected with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, an extremely rare and invariably fatal virus that is known to be harbored in the brain tissues of patients with the disease. Following this discovery, the National Institute of Health and the only two commercial manufacturers ceased distribution of natural growth hormone.

In October 1985, the FDA approved an application by Genentech, San Francisco, California, to market genetically synthesized human growth hormone under the trade name "Protropin". Genentech genetically synthesized the hormone by combining growth hormone genes selected from human cells with the DNA of a laboratory strain of the bacteria E. Coli. The human genes were then inserted into the DNA of the bacteria in such a way that the bacterium treated them as its own, producing large amounts of the desired hormone. Since Protropin is synthesized in bacteria, contamination with viruses indigenous to man is not believed possible. In 1987, the FDA also approved an application by Eli Lilly Co., Indianapolis, Indiana, to market genetically synthesized growth hormone under the trade name "Humatrope".

Due to its potential for abuse and known adverse side effects, the FDA approved the marketing of the genetically engineered human growth hormone only for the long-term treatment of children who have growth failure due to an inadequate secretion of normal endogenous growth hormone. Unfortunately, athletes have become

increasingly attracted to human growth hormone as it is believed to produce effects similar to that of anabolic steroids without some of the disadvantages of detection through drug tests. While it may conceivably be possible to test for increased levels of growth hormone, it is clearly more difficult to detect than most steroids. As a result, and because these substances may not be lawfully utilized for enhancing athletic performance, an expanding segment of the 200 to 400 million dollar steroid black market is turning to Genentech and Lilly growth hormone.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Phillip L.B. Halpern who is handling the prosecution, the indictment also charges Cambra with 1 count of distributing Stanazolol (an anabolic steroid), and 9 counts of distributing counterfeit drugs that purported to be anabolic steroids. While these counterfeits appeared to be anabolic steroids that were manufactured by legitimate pharmaceutical companies located throughout the world, an analysis by the Food and Drug Administration revealed that they contained only an "oil based" injectable liquid. The analysis thus revealed that the counterfeits did not contain anabolic steroids, but rather an inactive liquid apparently manufactured in a "clandestine" lab. While the sale of inactive counterfeits is not new, it appears that blackmarketeers may be increasing their reliance on these ersatz "steroids" as a result of the federal government's success in slowing down the illegal trafficking and manufacturing of counterfeits that contain active steroids.

Also indicted was James V. Soranno, a confederate allegedly

employed by Cambra to assist in the distribution of hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of human growth hormone and counterfeit anabolic steroids. The indictment alleges that Soranno was one of a number of coconspirators who were involved in Cambra's criminal network. If convicted, Cambra and Soranno each face a maximum of 38 years incarceration and a 3 million dollar fine. The defendants will be arraigned today in Magistrates Court in the Eastern District of California.

Braniff praised the efforts of the United States Food and Drug Administration, the California Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement and the United States Customs Service for their work on this complex investigation.

DEFENDANTS

1. William E. Cambra, Jr.
5830 Kimberly Hill Court
Carmichael, California
2. James V. Soranno
5124 Alrene Court
Carmel, California

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Indictment No: 89-0854-K

No. of Defendants: 2

No. of Counts: 12

Violations & Maximum Penalties:

Count 1: Conspiracy To Defraud The United States
5 years and/or a \$250,000 fine

Counts 2-10: Distribution of Counterfeit Steroids
3 years and/or a \$250,000 fine

Count 11: Distribution of Human Growth Hormone
3 years and/or a \$250,000 fine

Count 12: Distribution of Stanazolol
3 years and/or a \$250,000 fine