

Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy  
Committee on Oversight and Reform  
“Examining the Public Health Risks of Carcinogens in Consumer Products”  
Testimony of Marvin Salter  
March 12, 2019

Good morning Chairman Krishnamoorthi, Ranking Member Cloud and members of the Subcommittee. It is a great honor for me to address this subcommittee on behalf of my mother, the late Jacqueline Salter Fox. My mother departed this life on October 6, 2015. Her death came suddenly. At that time, she was doing well. She felt at that point that in her battle against ovarian cancer, she was winning. Her exact words were: “God wasn’t done with her yet.” But as we came to learn, like many women who suffer from this deadly disease, victories can be short-lived, and celebrations are often cut short. Her disease recurred with a vengeance, and my mom finally lost the fight.

My mother had me when she was sixteen years old, and we were all we had. In many ways, we grew up together. We saw hard times, but we always weathered the storm together. Her illness and eventual death was a storm neither of us were ready for and one from which I remain devastated.

I sincerely believe Johnson & Johnson’s Baby Powder took my mother’s life. We believed in the company, and in that product specifically. My mother was a true fan. She taught me at a very young age to make sure I took my bath and put my powder on. It was a staple in our house and a necessary part of our hygienic routine. My mom didn’t feel ready for the day without her powder on. It was as natural for her to do as brushing her teeth. Baby powder was always in our bathroom cabinets or bedroom dressers. It was wherever we were getting dressed. We never realized that what we were using could possibly be harmful. Had we known then what we know now, we never would have brought it into our house.

My mother’s ovarian cancer diagnosis was something of a fluke. She was not exhibiting symptoms at the time, but her faithful dog Dexter, a dog I now care for and love, thought otherwise. Dexter was acting strange around her, sniffing at her and whimpering, never leaving her side. She thought that maybe her dog was trying to tell her something. She went to the doctor and was immediately admitted to the hospital. She was diagnosed ovarian cancer. It was a rough time for us all, but my mother was the type of woman who never let bad news overtake her joy. She was confident she would beat the disease. She approached her treatment with a positive attitude and a big smile. She smiled through her surgery. She smiled through her chemotherapy and the hair loss it caused. She cheered up the other patients, even though her own body was wracked with pain and fatigue. She spent her time just as she had spent her life, serving and caring for others. Her spirit was never broken, despite what was happening to her body. She smiled through it all.

At some point she learned that her over thirty years of use of baby powder could have been responsible for her disease. I was not involved in her decision to file a lawsuit, but I supported my mother. She told me it was important to her to bring awareness to other women about the risk of cancer. She did not want any more women to go through what she

did. She was among the first to have her case heard and that gave her life so much more purpose and meaning. Unfortunately, she did not make it to her trial. Because I knew how important it was to her, it was important to me to continue the fight my mother could not finish. I wanted to make sure her voice was heard and I wanted Johnson & Johnson to know her name. I wanted them to know what a wonderful woman she was, and how unfair it is that she is no longer here with her family.

The trial was eye-opening. The evidence put forth against Johnson & Johnson was substantial. They lied to all of us. They knew of the cancer risks associated with their products but chose to cover them up instead. They protected their products and profits while putting innocent lives at risk. Each day revealed new details about exactly how much they knew and when they knew it. Testing of my mother's tissue revealed the presence of talc. I learned how talc migrates up the female pelvic system and causes chronic inflammation at the surface of the ovaries. I learned how talc particles can infiltrate the lymphatic system and spread throughout the body. I learned that talc is a mineral often found with heavy metals and asbestos, which are all known to be cancer-causing. In the end, the jury saw things the way we did and sided with her. In that moment, my mother's struggle was vindicated. Despite having passed she accomplished her goal of helping educate women everywhere that baby powder is a serious threat to women's health.

There have been more trials since my mother's. More juries have seen all the evidence. More news outlets have reported on this issue. The truth is finally coming out but justice has not yet been served. Johnson & Johnson has yet to take ownership for what they have done, and they have yet to take one step to make amends to all of us whose lives have been turned upside down because they trusted this company that said their product was safe. Johnson & Johnson continues to market and sell a product they know to be harmful, and they continue to lie and cover up the truth about its safety. It is past time for Johnson & Johnson to do the right thing. All my mother wanted is for women to know the risks of using baby powder. Johnson & Johnson could voluntarily add a warning to their product today. Or better yet, stop selling it altogether in the name of all of the women and children they have always claimed to love and care about. After all this time, it is safe to assume that Johnson & Johnson will not do what needs to be done to protect the public. I ask that this body use whatever power in its disposal, to assist in bringing about justice for my mother, and for all women and families who have been adversely affected by ovarian cancer caused by Johnson & Johnson's baby powder.