

### Lesson 6: New Medicines

#### Starter

In groups of four, read over the information and discuss whether anything else could have been done to prevent the effects of thalidomide.

I went to the doctor because I suffered from severe morning sickness while I was pregnant. The doctor told me of thalidomide and how it could treat my sickness. When he prescribed it for me, I felt relieved. After taking the medicine, I felt much better and my morning

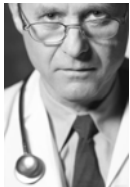


sickness subsided. Then, when Jack was born, I couldn't believe my eyes – he didn't have arms, just fingers at the end of his shoulders. His legs were very short too. I didn't want to touch him. I cried for days. I didn't know what had caused the problem at the time.



Thalidomide was developed in the 1950s as a sleeping pill. Then it was discovered that it stopped sickness in pregnancy. At the time, thalidomide seemed safe for adults, so it was assumed that it was also safe for unborn children. So doctors gave it to pregnant women to relieve their morning sickness. However, tests on pregnant animals were not carried out. When the women gave birth, their babies had severe limb deformities.

In the 1950s, doctors were told that thalidomide could be used as a sleeping pill and to treat morning sickness. When women came to see me because they were suffering from morning sickness, I prescribed thalidomide. At the time, doctors thought thalidomide was safe because all of the evidence produced by the pharmaceutical companies showed that it was safe for adults in the doses were used.



It was only when the women gave birth to deformed babies that questions started to be raised about the safety of thalidomide. When it was revealed that it was thalidomide that had caused the deformities, I was horrified. I was also annoyed at the drug companies for not testing thalidomide on pregnant animals.

I knew I was different from the other children as far back as I can remember. I didn't know why I was, but mum always told me it was because I was special. I couldn't do what the other children could do, but I learned how to write with my toes. In fact, my toes acted as fingers for most of the time. When I was older, my mum told me that I had been born as I was because of thalidomide. It had interfered with my limb development when I was a foetus. I asked mum why she had taken the drug. She said that she had taken it to treat her morning sickness, but knew nothing of the effects it had on limb growth.

