# Timeline Contergan



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# May 17, 1954

**Grünenthal registers thalidomide, the effective ingredient ultimately responsible for the severe damages incurred, with the German Patent Office.**

# March 1955

Clinical testing of thalidomide on humans begins. Prior to its introduction to the market, the substance is evaluated by at least 60 medical practitioners, of whom four publish their findings.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# August 9, 1956

The Ministry of the Interior of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) issues Grünenthal its approval for the production and marketing of Contergan and Contergan forte



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# November 1956 to March 1957

Grünenthal conducts test sales of Grippex, a thalidomide-based medication, in Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# Christmas 1956

Birth of the first child with malformations attributed to Contergan. An employee had taken a sample home and given it to his wife.

# October 1, 1957

Market launch of Contergan and Contergan forte (tablets) as over-the-counter sleeping and tranquilizing medications in the Federal Republic of Germany



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# June 1, 1959

Grünenthal introduces “Algosediv,” a medicinal combination containing thalidomide, as well as other dosage varieties of Contergan to the German market.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# October 2, 1959

The neurologist Ralf Voss reports nerve damage (polyneuropathy) detected in patients who took Contergan over longer periods of time.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# October 1960

The National Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians notifies the Medicinal Products Commission of the German Medical Association of neural disorders caused by Contergan and requests an official response.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# November 1960

Grünenthal adds a trivializing reference to the possibility of nerve damage following long-term consumption of Contergan and Contergan forte to its instructions for use.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# December 1, 1960

The Kali Chemie Co., a licensee of Grünenthal, introduces the thalidomide-based cough medication Peracon-Expectorans to the German market.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# December 31, 1960

A letter to the editor written by the Scottish physician Leslie Florence is the first published reference to the neurotoxic effects of thalidomide.

# January 1961

The British licensee Distillers reports the first case of a lethal dose (DL50 value), asserting that one can no longer claim “non-toxicity” or “harmlessness.”



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# February 15, 1961

Ralf Voss discusses irreversible nerve damage caused by thalidomide at a conference of neurologists in Düsseldorf. Cases of nerve damage caused by thalidomide are also reported at other physicians' conferences.

# February 28, 1961

Discussions between representatives of Grünenthal and Prof. Dr. Werner Scheid, Director of the University Neurology Clinic in Cologne. Scheid calls for the immediate imposition of a prescription requirement for the medication.

# March 30, 1961

The Düsseldorf neurologist Ralf Voss notifies the Interior Ministry of NRW of cases of thalidomide-related nerve damage.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# April 10, 1961

A pharmaceutical expert at the NRW Ministry of the Interior informs Grünenthal of the allegations regarding thalidomide posed by neurologist Voss and requests an official response.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# May & July 1961

Neurologists Horst Frenkel, Werner Scheid and Hans-Joachim Raffauf publish reports on thalidomide-related nerve damage in Medizinische Klinik and the Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift.
Reports by neurologists Ralf Voss and Josef Becker appear in other medical journals.

# May 26, 1961

Grünenthal applies to the NRW Ministry of the Interior for imposition of a prescription requirement but continues to deny a causal relationship between thalidomide and the observed neural disorders.

# June 23, 1961

The Medicinal Products Commission of the German Medical Association applies for the imposition of a prescription requirement for thalidomide by the NRW Ministry of the Interior.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# July 31, 1961

**The prescription requirement for thalidomide is officially imposed in NRW. It is already in effect in Hessen and Baden-Württemberg. It is not imposed in Berlin, Lower Saxony and Bavaria until after being withdrawn from the market.**

# August 1, 1961

The first German Medicinal Products Act becomes effective.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# August 16, 1961

**The Hamburg news magazine Der Spiegel reports on nerve damage caused by thalidomide.**



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# September 5, 1961

Grünenthal establishes a Contergan Commission tasked with managing all measures taken by the company with respect to the medication and refuting or settling claims filed by victims.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# September 16, 1961

Pediatrician Hans-Rudolf Wiedemann is the first to publish a report on a sharp rise in rare malformations in the Federal Republic of Germany.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# October 13,1961

Pharmacologist Fritz Kemper of Münster notifies Grünenthal that thalidomide causes bone-growth disorders and changes in organs in chickens.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# November 15, 1961

**Widukind Lenz, a physician in Hamburg, informs Grünenthal of his suspicion that Contergan causes malformations of the embryo when taken during pregnancy.**



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# November 18, 1961

Lenz discusses his suspicion at the Rheinisch-Westfälische Pediatricians' Conference but does not name the medication in question.

# November 20,1961

Meeting between Lenz and Grünenthal employees at the office of the health authority in Hamburg, which notifies the NRW Ministry of the Interior that same day.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# November 24, 1961

Meeting at the NRW Ministry of the Interior in which Lenz also takes part. Grünenthal refuses to withdraw the medication from the market, threatens to file claims for compensation and proposes printing warnings on all packaging units.

# November 25, 1961

The NRW Ministry of the Interior informs the health authorities and physicians' and pharmacists' associations about the suspicion in question. The company is made aware of yet another warning from Australia.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# November 26, 1961

**Welt am Sonntag reports on Lenz's suspicion in an article. Grünenthal then agrees to a (provisional) withdrawal of all thalidomide medications from the market, which begins on the following day.**

# November 27,1961

Kali Chemie also withdraws its thalidomide-based cough medication Peracon-Expectorans from the West German market.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# November 30, 1961

An expert commission appointed by the NRW Ministry of the Interior concludes that “it is sufficiently probable that thalidomide is responsible” for causing the disorders in question.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# December 18, 1961

The Public Prosecutor’s Office in Aachen, as the relevant jurisdictional authority, initiates investigative proceedings in response to the filing of a criminal complaint by a victim to the Public Prosecutor’s Office in Hannover.

# March 1962

**An employee of the licensee Distillers in England succeeds for the first time in reproducing malformations in an animal (rabbit).**

# July 1962

**As predicted, the appearance of specific malformations ceases abruptly eight months after the thalidomide-containing medications are withdrawn from the market.**



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# September 24, 1962

A special “Contergan” Commission established by State Criminal Investigation Office in NRW begins its work in support of the State Public Prosecutor’s Office.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# March 8,1963

**Medications containing thalidomide are prohibited in NRW in accordance with § 42 of the Medicinal Products Act following the revelation of isolated cases in which they were sold from remaining stocks.**



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# June 23,1964

An amended version of the Medicinal Products Act (“Contergan Amendment”) takes effect in the Federal Republic. Among other things, the amended law provides an automatic three-year prescription requirement for new types of medication.

# May 1965

Jacob Sheskin, a dermatologist from Israel, publishes a report on the impact of thalidomide on patients suffering from leprosy after having administered the medication to leprosy patients from remaining stocks and observing a reduction in ulcerations.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# July 1965

The criminal investigations conducted by the Public Prosecutor’s Office have been concluded, for the most part. Preparations are now being made for the final hearings and the indictment.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# March 13, 1967

**The Public Prosecutor’s Office in Aachen files public charges against nine executive employees of the Grünenthal Company. The indictment comprises 972 pages.**

# January 18, 1968

The Superior Criminal Court of the District Court of Aachen approves the indictment and opens the main proceedings.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# May 27, 1968

The first day of the trial. Because there is no courtroom of sufficient size in the District Court Building in Aachen, the main proceedings are conducted in a rented coal mine casino in Alsdorf.

# January 26, 1970

Grünenthal announces its intention to make 100 million DM available in compensation, provided all further risks to the defendants and the company under criminal and civil law are ruled out in return.



gefördert durch
Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW

# April 10,1970

**A representative of children suffering from damages caused by thalidomide and the Grünenthal Company reach a settlement valued at 100 million DM. Negotiations regarding the dismissal of proceedings are conducted at the same time.**

# December 18,1970

**Criminal proceedings in the Contergan case are closed in accordance with § 153, paragraph 3 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. No other options for ending a trial without a verdict exist.**

# October 31, 1972

The “Hilfswerk für das behinderte Kind” (Organization for the Relief of Disabled Children), to which the settlement amount of 100 million DM has been transferred by law, is effectively established. The Federal Government contributes an additional 100 million DM.

# Conclusion

The full extent of the catastrophe did not become evident until after Contergan had been withdrawn from the market. Roughly five million consumers in West Germany took 300 million daily doses of the medication between October 1957 and November 1961. Medications containing thalidomide were sold in 48 countries. In the years between 1958 and 1962, some 10,000 children worldwide were born with severe malformations, most of them affecting the limbs. Some 5,000 newborn infants experienced that fate in Germany, and roughly 2,800 survived. According to Prof. Klaus Roth from the Freie Universität Berlin, the temporal correlation between sales figures for Contergan and the observed malformations serve as evidence of the causal relationship.

A production of the DUTZ - Dialogue and Transfer Centre Interest group for Thalidomide victims NRW e.V., Cologne


Author: Dr. Niklas Lenhard-Schramm
Conception and Implementation: Christoph Soppa

**In cooperation with:**

**Scientific monitoring of the project**
"Dialogue and Transfer Centre Dysmelia (DUTZ)"
by the **Hochschule für Gesundheit (hsg)**
**University of Applied Sciences**
Gesundheitscampus 6-8, 44801 Bochum



sponsored by Stiftung Wohlfahrtspflege NRW