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**Arthritis Drugs Celebrex–Vioxx Safety in Doubt**

**By Margot B**

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"Arthritis drugs Vioxx, Celebrex safety in doubt"

In doubt and may not be as safe as previously thought. Research earlier this year has shown that these drugs increased the risk of heart attacks although a relatively low risk, over those taking a pain reliever. The FDA is debating whether to add information about the increased risk on both drugs' labels. One Wall Street analyst has warned that this problem could have an adverse effect on Merck, the drug company responsible for these drugs be placed on the market – along with Pharmacia, which makes Celebrex, generating \$2.3 billion in 12 months to March 31 of this year, Merck having sold \$1.7 billion Vioxx during the same 12 months.

Studies done last year showed that patients taking Vioxx had four times the risk of heart attacks over patients taking Naproxen – another pain reliever. Naproxen is also sold under the brands names of Naprosyn and Aleve. The risk of heart attacks increases over time, at about four heart attacks per 1,000 patients. This study was sponsored by the Merck company, which also stated that their research does not show this problem of increased heart attacks with Vioxx.

These two drugs are among the best–sellers of prescription drugs in the world. They cause fewer ulcers than many other drugs given for pain. Richard R. Stover, a pharmaceutical industry analyst at Arnhold & S. Bleichroeder Inc, reported on April 27 that he did his own analysis on what he called "disturbing data" from Merck's study. He stated that he was warning his clients, many of whom were institutional investors holding stock in Merck, that they should watch the issue carefully because it could effect the company's stock price.

Dr. M. Michael Wolfe, chief of the gastroenterology section at the Boston University School of Medicine and a member of the FDA advisory committee stated

that there should be a warning, after a review of the issue earlier this year, stating that

"The marketing of these drugs is unbelievable, I'm sure there are many people out there who are taking these drugs that should not be."

There is a current debate going on between some doctors and Merck's scientists as to whether the higher risk of heart attacks is a result of Vioxx causing damage in some patients or to an absence of the benefits that Naproxen may have in protecting the heart, that Naproxen stops or slows the production of thromboxane, which is thought to cause platelet in the blood to form clots, similar to the aspirin effect.

Vioxx and Celebrex have been shown to have the same benefit in protecting the heart.

Several doctors say they are worried about the possibility of heart attacks because many of the arthritis patients taking the drugs are elderly and have a higher risk of cardiovascular problems to begin with.

The current debate centers on whether the higher heart attack rate found in patients taking Vioxx is a result of the drug's actually causing damage in some patients or to an absence of the heart-protecting benefits that Naproxen may have.

"Naproxen had a similar anti-platelet effect to aspirin," said Dr. Eve E. Slater, senior vice president of external policy for Merck's research labs, "and those people had fewer heart attacks."

Neither Vioxx nor Celebrex has been shown to have the same heart-protecting benefit.

Slater also said that Stover's report was flawed and biased in favor of Pharmacia. But regulators and some doctors say they still worry that there may be more of a problem with Vioxx.

And even if Vioxx and Celebrex do not damage the heart, the fact that they do not have the heart-protecting benefits of aspirin reduces the ability of the companies to market them as being significantly safer than other pain relievers.

Merck recommended last year that doctors involved in clinical trials of Vioxx consider prescribing low doses of aspirin to patients taking Vioxx if they are at high risk of heart attacks – although low doses of aspirin could increase the risk of ulcers. Ulcers are the main side effect that Vioxx and Celebrex were developed to avoid.

There have been no studies done to determine whether patients have fewer ulcers

if they take low doses of aspirin with either Vioxx or Celebrex. In February Dr Maria Lourdes Villalba, at an FDA advisory meeting, stated that Merck had proved Vioxx [Rofecoxib] caused fewer serious ulcers than Naproxen. However, she also state that the potential safety advantage was offset by a higher risk of heart problems,in her opinion. She reported that "Overall, there was no safety superiority of Rofecoxib over Naproxen, mainly due to an excess of serious cardiovascular events".

Dr Villalba also stated that there had been no studies to prove Merck's claim that Naproxen worked like aspirin in decreasing heart attacks. The FDA expressed some concern over the higher rate of heart attacks with Vioxx, stating that this could be caused by the drug's ability to produce blood clots.

"There is still a tremendous benefit with these drugs" reported Dr Eve Slater of Merck.

Margot B, Writer, Web DeveloperMargot B has written a book and hundreds of articles, specializing in health and the environment.<mailto:margotb@wonderport.com>Web Sites by Margot B:<http://margot.bravepages.com><http://margotsnews.gossimer.net><http://websitebuilder4free.Biz-Page.com><http://www.freewebz.com/nuchatlaht>

## **Celebrex and Bextra Proving to be Popular Alternatives to Discontinued Vioxx**

**By Elena Ivantsova**

Montreal, Quebec (AffordableDrugs) December 30, 2004 - The prescription drugs Celebrex and Bextra have grown in popularity since the arthritis painkiller Vioxx was pulled off the market earlier this year for safety concerns. Celebrex and Bextra are similar drugs to Vioxx as they are cox-2 inhibitors, and they also help relieve the pain caused by arthritic pain.

Vioxx, the arthritis medication produced by Merck Frost, was pulled off the market earlier this year due to concerns about possible side effects. Certain reports indicated that extended use of Vioxx could lead to the possibility of heart problems. At the time Vioxx was removed it was among the most popular and widely used medications. Last year, Vioxx generated annual sales of more than \$2 billion.

Since Vioxx was pulled, the medications Celebrex and Bextra have become popular alternatives. Celebrex has seen its market share in cox-2 inhibitors increase substantially from 48.7% in September 2004 to 63.5% in October 2004. That is an increase of almost 15% in one month. Bextra has also seen a similar increase as it went from a 23.5% market share in September to a 36% in October. As can be seen from the above data, the void left by Vioxx is quickly being filled by Celebrex and Bextra.

Celebrex and Bextra are currently available from AffordableDrugs at prices much lower than anywhere in the United States. Celebrex is available from AffordableDrugs at 100mg for 100 capsules: \$92.50, 200 capsules: \$173.64, 300 capsules: \$254.79. Bextra is available for 10mg for 100 tablets: \$167.40,

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200 tablets: \$323.45, 300 tablets: \$479.50.

Vioxx is developed and manufactured by Merck Frost. Celebrex and Bextra are developed and manufactured by Pfizer.

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None

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Pfizer's Bextra Faces Its First Lawsuit

Vioxx Withdrawal and Drug Litigation

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