



AUSTRALIAN RHEUMATOLOGY ASSOCIATION
Therapeutics Committee

PRESS RELEASE

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Recall of Vioxx Worldwide

Earlier today Merck & Company announced a voluntary worldwide withdrawal of Vioxx (rofecoxib), a medication used to treat various forms of arthritis and acute pain. The withdrawal follows the early termination of a trial examining the use of Vioxx (rofecoxib) 25 mg per day versus placebo in preventing recurrence of colorectal polyps. In this prospective randomised study patients taking Vioxx were at increased risk of heart attack and stroke after taking medication for 18 months or more. The study was terminated earlier than the proposed three year duration because of these findings. The risk of having a cardiovascular event was approximately double in patients on Vioxx compared with those taking placebo (relative risk 1.96).

Ever since the first trials of Vioxx were reported there has been a suggestion of an increased risk of cardiovascular events but in most of these trials the dose of Vioxx had been 50 mg daily which is twice the recommended maximum dose for osteoarthritis in Australia. However the latest study indicates that the risk of cardiovascular events is seen even with Vioxx doses of 25 mg daily.

Despite the fact that many patients benefit from this medication in the treatment of joint disease it is clear that the cardiovascular risk is increased and hence the worldwide withdrawal of Vioxx.

In Australia there are estimated to be more than 300,000 patients taking Vioxx for osteoarthritis via the PBS with an unspecified number of other patients taking the medication for other forms of arthritis and pain syndromes. Vioxx accounts for about \$90,000,000 worth of sales through Australian pharmacies.

Any patient who is currently taking Vioxx should contact their GP or rheumatologist to discuss alternate anti-inflammatory treatment. Published guidelines for the treatment of osteoarthritis recommend paracetamol as agent of first choice.

Dr J. V. Bertouch
Chairman, Therapeutics Committee
Australian Rheumatology Association
Mobile: 0408 976 965
Telephone (H): 02 9969 8928

A/Professor Michael Ahern
President
Australian Rheumatology Association