

# DRUG SIDE-EFFECTS CAUSE CONCERN AMONGST PEOPLE WITH ARTHRITIS

Submitted by: Hill & Knowlton (UK)

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Vienna, Austria, Thursday, 9th June, 2005. People with arthritis remain concerned and confused over the side-effects of their medication following the furore over COX-2 selective NSAIDs (painkillers), according to the results of a new European survey released today.[1]

Since the withdrawal of popular COX-2 selective NSAID used to treat arthritis, Vioxx® (rofecoxib), and the suspension of Bextra® (valdecoxib), after studies linked them to increased cardiovascular risk in long-term use, many patients now face a serious dilemma over alternative treatment options to manage their arthritis. All NSAIDs – which include aspirin and ibuprofen – carry a risk of upper gastrointestinal (GI) side-effects. For example, each year in the UK NSAIDs cause approximately 3,500 hospitalisations for, and 400 deaths from, ulcer bleeding in patients aged 60 years and above. [2]

Despite the well-publicised risks, more than 45 per cent (46.18 per cent) of those questioned said they had received little or no support on managing the side-effects of their treatment from their doctor. More than one in six people with arthritis (17.8 per cent) were still unaware of potential drug side-effects.

The survey findings support work by professional organisations who are calling for improved guidance on arthritis treatments, to help doctors address patient concerns.

Professor Greg Rubin, Chairman of the European Society for Primary Care Gastroenterology (ESPCG) and Professor of Primary Care at the University of Sunderland, UK, said: "These results reflect the fact that it is not only patients who are confused over the side-effects of non-selective and COX-2 selective NSAIDs – doctors have also received a huge amount of conflicting information on the drugs. This means that GPs face the serious task of counselling people with arthritis on the different treatment options, without themselves feeling totally confident of the best course of action. With this in mind, we have already begun formulating some sort of guidance to help GPs through this difficult time."

Combining NSAID therapy with the proton pump inhibitor (PPI) Nexium® (esomeprazole) effectively resolves symptoms of heartburn and acid regurgitation,[3] as well as preventing peptic and gastric ulcers in at-risk patients, and healing gastric ulcers associated with continuous use of NSAIDs.[4],[5] A cost-effectiveness study recently determined that the combination of a non-selective NSAID plus a PPI is a more cost-effective treatment option than a COX-2 selective NSAID alone in preventing ulcer complications for many arthritic patients, particularly those at high risk of a GI or cardiovascular adverse event.[6]

However, the European survey of 626 arthritis sufferers found that only 25 per cent had been offered

treatment to protect against the upper GI side-effects associated with the long-term use of their medication.

The key to managing NSAID-associated upper GI side-effects is controlling gastric acid secretion. Nexium<sup>®</sup> has been shown to provide consistently more effective control of gastric acidity than all other PPIs.[7],[8] It has also been shown to provide more effective gastric acid control than lansoprazole or pantoprazole in patients on NSAIDs, including COX-2 selective NSAIDs.[9] Nexium<sup>®</sup> works by deactivating the proton (acid) pumps that produce stomach acid, reducing the amount of acid that is in the stomach. Nexium<sup>®</sup> is only available on prescription. The most common side-effects with Nexium<sup>®</sup> are headache, diarrhoea, and abdominal pain, which occur in around one per cent of patients.

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Notes to Editors

#### European Arthritis Patient (E-A-P) Survey

The E-A-P survey was conducted to investigate the level of awareness of side-effects of arthritis or rheumatism treatments amongst patients in Europe. The survey also sought to gain an insight into the professional advice and guidance being offered to these patients regarding their arthritis / rheumatism treatments.

The telephone survey involved 626 patients with arthritis or rheumatism in Austria (180 patients), Germany (103 patients), Ireland (141 patients) and Portugal (202 patients).

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