

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Statins: Know Your Risks”

With the Pharmaceutical industry and the American Medical Association attempting to "statinize" the world, it becomes increasingly important for patients to be aware of potential side effects of these powerful drugs. Statins, like all medicines, have potential side effects. The new guidelines for statin cholesterol-lowering drugs has opened up the possibility of eventually having 1 billion people taking these drugs on a daily basis. In March of 2012, an important paper was presented at the American College of Cardiology (ACC) 61st Annual Scientific Session, which found evidence that lower "bad LDL-cholesterol" predated the development of cancer by about 2 years. The "forward-causality" hypothesis states that depressed "bad LDL cholesterol" is a precursor to cancer. There is long standing evidence that some patients with too low levels of total cholesterol (below 160) are at risk for altered mental function, emotional problems (depression and suicidal tendencies), anxiety, violent behavior and risk of hemorrhagic stroke. The famous Framingham study found that higher cholesterol levels were associated with increased mortality before the age of fifty, but after this age, cholesterol levels in men and women showed no relationship with cardiovascular disease or total mortality and for every 1 mg/dl per year drop in cholesterol levels, there was a 14% increase in cardiovascular death and an 11% increase in overall mortality over the following eighteen years. And, several studies have found that higher cholesterol levels are predictive of increased survival and greater longevity in the older age groups. The statin drugs have been linked to muscle problems and liver and kidney problems, but only in a very small number of cases. But, in 2012, the FDA had issued new labeling guidelines for statin drugs warning users that the medications can cause memory loss, elevated blood sugar levels, and type-2 diabetes, in addition to muscle damage and liver disease. The reports about memory loss, forgetfulness and confusion span all statin products and all age groups. A 2013 article states, "The use of statins appears to be associated with a 19% increased risk of musculoskeletal injuries, including a 13% increased risk of dislocations, strains, and sprains." And, there was a trend toward a 7% higher risk of osteoarthritis/arthropathies. Still, the FDA was quick to say that patients should still keep taking their statin-medications.

In the America that I love, people should be encouraged to lead healthier lifestyles to reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease and not rely on drugs. Lower your cholesterol by eating a healthy, balanced diet and doing regular physical exercise. The British Heart Foundation says that even if you've already got a heart condition, having a healthy diet can benefit your heart. Please be familiar with the risks and adverse signs of your medications.

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