



Press release by the International Menopause Society

15 July 2011

Withdrawal of HRT implant may lead to problems for patients

The International Menopause Society is concerned that patients will suffer due to the sudden discontinuation of a HRT medication.

MSD (known as Merck in North America), the world's second-largest pharmaceutical company, has decided to discontinue the manufacture of estradiol implants – pellets which are implanted under the skin, and give a continuous flow of the hormone over a period of time. MSD has written to doctors to say that it is no longer economical to manufacture these implants, and that there are alternatives available. However, MSD's decision means that estradiol implants will no longer be available in most countries in the world.

The International Menopause Society (IMS) is concerned that this will leave many patients with restricted choices on how to continue their treatment.

This may mean that it is difficult for a women to settle to a suitable replacement, which in turn could affect her future well-being.

The IMS is also concerned at MSD's statement that the decision has been taken largely on the grounds of cost-effectiveness, and asks MSD to give greater consideration to the needs of women going through the menopause. In July 2010 MSD announced a process of restructuring which requires the shutting of 8 manufacturing plants, and the laying off around 15% of their workforce¹.

IMS President, Dr Tobie de Villiers (Cape Town, South Africa) said:

"It seems to us that the decision to withdraw the only generally available HRT implant will lead to difficulties for many women. MSD says that there are alternative ways to take estradiol, which is true, but that's only half the story.

Once someone has settled to a particular way to take a medication, any change can be disruptive. Almost all medicines suffer from people not taking them, or forgetting to take them, or getting the dosage wrong, with around half of long-term medicines not being taken properly². Once inserted, an implant allows women to then to effectively forget about it for a few months.

Now women using implants for the management of menopausal symptoms will have to choose from and acclimatise to different drug-delivery methods. This may cause them difficulties, and some will not adapt well. In fact, many women have decided to use implants because they could not settle to alternative methods. This disruption is not a trivial problem; a drug being available is one thing, but it is of little use if it is not taken".

International Menopause Society

Dr de Villiers continued

“We have approached MSD to discuss if anything can be done to restart the manufacturing process, but unfortunately, the decision seems to be final”.

ENDS

Information for Editors

The International Menopause Society is the global body representing clinicians and scientists working with the menopause. Website: www.imsociety.org

For more information on this story, or for comment or background on the menopause, please contact the IMS Press Officer, Tom Parkhill:

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Note: An NHS (from the UK) report on withdrawal of implants can be found at:

<http://www.nelm.nhs.uk//en/NeLM-Area/News/2011---July/12/MSD-discontinues-manufacture-of-Estradiol-implants-/>

(1) Merck Press release, July 8 2010

http://www.merck.com/newsroom/news-release-archive/corporate/2010_0708.html

(2) World Health Organisation, Adherence to long-term therapies: evidence for action, WHO report 2003.

“...In developed countries, adherence to long-term therapies in the general population is around 50%..” (page 22).

http://www.who.int/chp/knowledge/publications/adherence_full_report.pdf