

“Alli”

The New OTC (over the counter) Fat Blocker ?

Flushing Out The Truth

As a physician who has committed the past 15 years of my professional career to the medical treatment of the overweight and obese patient, I feel a bit of urgency to express my concern and, in part, disgust, over the newly approved OTC “fat blocker” Alli and GSK (Glaxo Smith Kline) the pharmaceutical company who owns it.

According to an Associated press news report by Candice Choi (May 22, 2007), GSK is “counting on Alli becoming a star money maker this year” and is spending \$150 million on marketing to ensure its success. “We’ve done everything to go out of our way to be honest”, said Steve Burton, vice president of the weight control (spin control) division at GSK Consumer Healthcare. (Is Mr. Burton implying that previous marketing of their other drugs have been less than honest?) Consider the following:

- GSK states that Alli is half the dosage (60mg) of the prescription drug Xenical (120mg), also known as Orlistat. No disagreement here.

- GSK states that Alli blocks 25% of fat ingested, whereas Xenical at twice (100%) the dose blocks 30% of fat ingested. In other words, Alli the OTC drug, at half dose, blocks 83% as much fat as the prescription drug Xenical which is twice the dose. Makes this physician a bit skeptical.

- GSK states it is important to keep meals UNDER 15 grams of fat. Okay, suppose your meal consists of 12 grams of fat which is equal to 108 calories. (1 gm of fat has 9 calories, so $12 \times 9 = 108$ fat calories) If Alli blocks 25% of fat ingested then it would block 27 calories of fat for that meal (108 calories x 25% = 27 calories.) THE PROBLEM IS THAT THERE ARE 3500!!!! CALORIES IN A POUND! (Actually there are 4086 calories in a pound of fat (1 pound = 454 grams x 9 calories/gram = 4086 calories)*)

Soooo, if one used Alli 2x/day it would block 27 calories x 2 = 54 calories of fat/day, and assuming all things to be equal, it would take 65 days to lose ONE POUND!!!! (54 calories x 65 days = 3510 calories.) IN OTHER WORDS one has to eat 14,000 calories of fat (I don’t believe GSK mentioned that) to block 25% to lose one stinkin, and I mean stinkin, pound! ($14,000 \times 25\% = 3500$ calories = 1 pound)

- Finally, and in case you missed AP’s quote from Steve Burton, vice president of the weight control division at GSK, it bears repeating, “WE’VE DONE EVERYTHING TO GO OUT OF OUR WAY TO BE HONEST.” Oh, really? So when can we schedule the polygraph?

What the makers of the prescription drug Xenical, Roche Pharmaceutical, in their prescribing information to physicians, refer to as “Adverse Events” in the PDR (Physician Desk Reference) i.e., “oily stools, leakage, bowel urgency, greasy stools, incontinence of bowels, etc.” are referred to by GSK in reference to Alli as “Treatment Effects.” Sooo, “ADVERSE EVENTS” for Xenical = TREATMENT EFFECTS” for Alli?



I emailed the Consumer Healthcare people at GSK expressing my confusion and wondering is somehow Webster Dictionary had made a mistake in their definitions of “Adverse” vs. “Treatment.”

I received the following e-mail on 7/2/2007. In part, it reads:

Regarding your communication to GSK. Code ID: 259

“Dear Mr. Skversky,
We have received your email message regarding Alli/Orlistat 60mg Capsules Weight Loss Aid.

We choose to use the word ‘treatment’ instead of ‘adverse’. Basically, the same thing is implied just different words.

We appreciate you taking the time to contact us.”

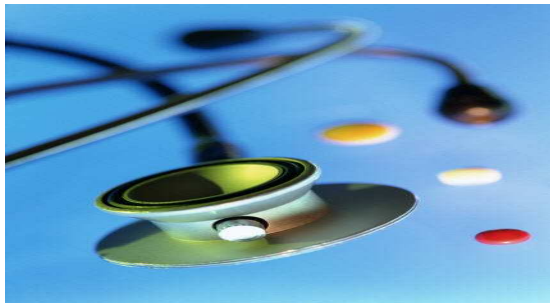
Sincerely,
(name withheld)
GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare

So I guess Webster is in error . . . I'll have to email them next to be sure they make a correction in their next publication.

And finally, GSK makes clear in their treatment information that if you do not experience any of the "Treatment Effects", be assured that Alli is working just as it was intended. (Now I'm really getting confused.)

So, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of Alli? Surely not the overweight/obese consumer often desperate to lose weight and relying on "honest" information from Big Pharma. Rather GSK, of course, but also bound to profit are the toilet paper companies, (isn't that Charmin?), makers of air fresheners, and your neighborhood dry cleaners.

Yes, Alli works alright (did I mention cost?) to slim your wallet, not your waist!!



Buyer Beware!

A pound of pure fat is 4086 calories (454 grams x 9 = 4086). However, body fat is 10% water and at 5%, does not get absorbed, thus 4086 – 15% = 3500 calories.

My next article will discuss generic vs. brand drugs: Are they the same? And if not, who's to blame?

Robert Skversky, M.D.