

# Websites advertising cholesterol-lowering drugs of poor quality

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A new study published in the journal *Pharmacoepidemiology & Drug Safety* reveals that internet sites selling prescription statins directly to consumers are widespread, and that most websites advertising statins for sale to the general public contain very poor levels of information relevant to safe use of the medicine and side effects.

Researchers led by Professor David Brown, School of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences, University of Portsmouth, simulated a customer search and evaluation of 184 retrieved sites using evaluation tools focusing on quality and safe medicine use.

Results showed that a potential purchaser of statins is likely to encounter websites from a wide geographical base of generally poor quality.

General contraindications were absent in 92.4% of sites and contraindicated medicines were absent in 47.3%. Key warnings on the appearance of symptoms associated with myopathy, liver disease, hypersensitivity and pancreatitis were absent in 37, 48.4, 91.3, and 96.2% of sites respectively.

Most websites presented a chaotic and incomplete list of known side effects; just 13 (7.1%) presented a list compatible with current prescribing information. Only two thirds (65.8%) attempted to describe any side effects in lay language.

"Websites offering statins for sale contain little information on the safety

of these drugs, which are intended as prescription only medicines" Brown notes. "There is an inherent danger in patients seeking to self-medicate in this way without consulting a healthcare professional and being appraised of ways to use the medicine safely."

Provided by Wiley

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