

Japan may regulate thalidomide

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Doctors in Japan will be required to register patients who are using the drug thalidomide under proposed regulations, the Japan Times reported.

Citing sources in the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry, the newspaper said that doctors would be required to identify patients by initial and gender and to identify the hospitals where they are being treated.

Thalidomide has been banned in Japan for more than 40 years. The drug, originally marketed as a tranquilizer, was found to cause severe birth defects when used by pregnant women, with thousands of children born with defective limbs.

In recent years, the drug has been found to be effective against bone cancer. A clinical trial is under way in Japan.

Under the proposed rules, doctors would be urged to advise female patients to use contraception while taking thalidomide and to advise the ministry if any become pregnant, the Times said.

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