

Pfizer heart pill to be standalone therapy

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U.S.-based Pfizer Inc., the world's largest pharmaceutical company, says it has decided to sell a new heart treatment medication as a standalone pill.

Pfizer initially announced it would sell the new drug, torcetrapib, only in combination with Lipitor, the company's best-selling cholesterol treatment medication, The New York Times reported. That decision produced strong opposition from physicians.

Torcetrapib, still being tested in clinical trials, is at least 18 months from receiving federal approval. But initial trial results indicate the drug substantially raises the levels of so-called good cholesterol -- a novel approach to preventing heart attacks and strokes, the Times said.

If Pfizer had offered torcetrapib only in a combination pill, that would have forced patients taking other cholesterol-lowering statins -- such as Merck & Co. Inc.'s Zocor -- to switch to Lipitor to obtain torcetrapib's benefits.

If proven effective, industry observers say the drug could potentially garner several billion dollars annually in sales.

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