

Anemia drugs under scrutiny

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U.S. drug regulators are contemplating further restrictions on the use of drugs to combat anemia in cancer patients.

A Food and Drug Administration advisory committee is to meet Thursday to consider eliminating the use of Amgen's drugs Epogen and Aranesp, and the Johnson & Johnson drug Procrit for cancer patients with certain types of tumors or eliminating the use among all cancer patients, The New York Times reported.

The newspaper said eight clinical trials have suggested the drugs might make tumors worse or shorten the life of cancer patients. One FDA adviser last year called the drugs "Miracle-Gro for cancer."

Researchers said the anemia drugs are synthetic forms of a human hormone called erythropoietin, or Epo, that is involved in the production of red blood cells. Epo may encourage the growth of blood vessels that nourish tumors or may actually stimulate tumors directly, scientists said. Another theory is that Epo protects tumors from being destroyed by chemotherapy.

Amgen said it has not seen any convincing evidence Epo does anything but spur red blood cell production, the newspaper said.

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