

FDA OKs Relistor for opioid patients

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The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved Relistor (methylnaltrexone bromide) to help restore bowel function in patients receiving opioids.

The FDA said opioids are often prescribed on a continuous basis for patients with late-stage, advanced illness to help alleviate pain, such as in cases of incurable cancer, heart failure and Alzheimer's disease with dementia.

But opioids can interfere with normal bowel movements by relaxing the intestinal smooth muscles and preventing them from contracting and pushing out waste products. Relistor acts by blocking opioid entrance into the cells, thus allowing the bowels to continue to function normally.

"This new drug will be helpful to patients who experience severe constipation associated with the continuous use of morphine or other opioids, which are an important part of care for patients with late-stage, advanced illness." said Dr. Joyce Korvick, deputy director of the FDA's division of gastroenterology products.

Relistor is manufactured by Wyeth Pharmaceuticals Inc. of Philadelphia and Progenics Pharmaceuticals of Tarrytown, N.Y.

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