Pfizer cancel diabetes drug

Pfizer, the global drug manufacturer and pharmaceutical company are planning to stop selling their inhaled insulin product Exubera. The news will come as a surprise to many, as the idea of inhaled insulin was perceived as the holy grail of diabetes treatment until recently.

Pfizer have heavily promoted Exubera in the 2 years it has been on the market, yet sales of the drug remain tiny. Overall, it accounts for less than 1% of the total insulin market.

The withdrawal of Exubera is expected to cost some US$2.8 billion. This renders the entire fiasco one of the most expensive flops in pharmaceutical history.

The decision raises greater overall questions about the potential for inhaled insulin to command strong sales and compete with normal injectable insulin.

The chairman of Pfizer, Jeffrey B. Kindler, reportedly concluded, ‘Despite our best efforts, Exubera has failed to gain the acceptance of patients and physicians.’

Gestational diabetes code discovery

A new gestational diabetes discovery could allow medical experts to develop new treatments for all forms of diabetes.

Researchers at the US Stanford University School of Medicine have found a particular protein in the pancreas that could hint at how diabetes develops during pregnancy.

The senior author of the study, Seung Kim, who is an associate professor of developmental biology, called the basis of gestational diabetes a ‘black box’. The protein, known as menin, has been previously confirmed to prevent pancreatic cancer.

By doing a study on mice, the research team found that those that produce too much menin faced a greater risk of gestational diabetes. Kim reportedly commented, ‘This suggests that there is an internal code for controlling pancreatic islet growth, a code we intend to crack.’

The study will be published in the journal Science, and could have great implications for the future treatment of diabetes.

Diabetes alert in Ghana

Diabetes could be threatening the lives of some 50% of patients in Ghana. At least 2.2 million Ghanaians already suffer from the disease.

World Diabetes Day, on November 14th, has provoked the Ghana Diabetes Association to release a statement. They estimate that one person dies every 10 seconds due to diabetes. Furthermore, some 360 million people will become diabetic by 2025. The most seriously affected countries in the world could be low-middle-income ones like Ghana.

In Ghana, like many developing countries around the world, the erosion of traditional lifestyle and diet is largely causing diabetes. The president of the Ghana diabetes association, Dr. Kwamena Beecham, commented, ‘Most people have moved from the traditional foods to more processed, polished, and animal-sourced foods that are rich in fats and sugars. To reverse this trend requires a whole government approach rather than solitary action from government bodies responsible for the control of diabetes.

Insulin from genetically modified plants?

US researchers have found that feeding mice with lettuce and tobacco plants that had been genetically modified to produce the precursor protein of insulin preserved the insulin-producing beta-cells in the animals’ pancreas. Having developed the genetically modified plants, the scientists fed leaves in either powdered or untreated form to mice with diabetes over a 7-week period.

The treated mice showed lower blood or urine glucose levels than control animals with the condition, which lost a significant proportion of their beta cells over the study period. It is reported that after the encouraging results in animals, testing in people is now underway. The investigators expressed their hope that generating the pro-insulin protein in plants might lead to a low-cost alternative to standard methods of producing the hormone.

Positive trials for diabetes drug

The long-acting version of a diabetes drug has received positive results from a phase III study.

Long-acting Byetta LAR, developed by Eli Lilly in conjunction with Amylin Pharmaceuticals, will allow diabetes patients to control blood sugar levels efficiently over a long period of time.

The drug is administered as a once-weekly injection. According to the recent study, type 2 diabetes patients achieve a 1.9% improvement in A1c levels. For those who use regular Byetta, the improvement stands at 1.5%, according to trials.

Treatment for pain in diabetic neuropathy

Surveys have indicated that between one in eight and one in three patients with diabetes has a peripheral neuropathy. Pain or paraesthesiae affect up to a third of these patients and treatment with antidepressants or anticonvulsants is commonly used. A systematic review of the effects of these and other treatments concluded that for short-term pain relief oral tricyclic antidepressants and older anticonvulsants are better than newer anticonvulsants.