

Man slashed wrists on Seroxat

by JAMES TOZER, Daily Mail



Pic: Mark Large

Danger: coroner calls for Seroxat to be withdrawn

A coroner has called for Britain's biggest-selling antidepressant to be withdrawn after a retired headmaster who was prescribed the drug was found dead with slashed wrists.

Colin Whitfield, 56, died just two weeks after he began taking Seroxat.

At his inquest, Brecon Coroner Geraint Williams said he would be writing to Health Secretary Alan Milburn to demand the drug be withdrawn for further safety checks.

He said: 'I have grave concerns that this is a dangerous drug that should be withdrawn until at least detailed national studies are undertaken.'

'I am profoundly disturbed by the effect this drug had on Colin Whitfield. It is quite clear that Seroxat has a profound effect on the thinking process of anyone who takes it.'

The inquest heard evidence from Mr Whitfield's wife, Kathryn, that her husband of 30 years was a protective and loving father who had been prescribed Seroxat for anxiety.

A fortnight later he locked himself in his garden shed and slit his wrists.

Seroxat - also known as the 'antishyness pill' - has overtaken Prozac in popularity since it was licensed in 1990. It was prescribed to 400,000 patients in Britain last year.

Some 4,000 users are threatening legal action against makers GlaxoSmithKline saying they suffered unpleasant withdrawal symptoms - including suicidal feelings - after they stopped taking it.

The Government announced a review of Seroxat's safety last year but the drug remains available.

Mr Whitfield, of Llanfrynach, Powys, was prescribed Seroxat last summer.

His widow told the hearing there was nothing to suggest he was suicidal and he had not been suffering from depression.

She said she was certain Seroxat was to blame for his death on August 29.

'It didn't fit the picture of who he was and we have no doubt that it was the drug that caused him to do it,' she said.

'Two days before he died, on his birthday when he was opening presents, he asked, "What more can I ask for than my lovely family?"'

Mrs Whitfield said she was convinced her husband had not been fully conscious of what he was doing.

The Yorkshireman had been looking forward to the coming rugby season and had also written to his mother to say he hoped to see her soon.

'What he did was so totally out of character. He was a very caring, very protective father



Safety checks: coroner says more checks need to be carried out

and husband,' she said. 'He would be hating himself for what he has done to his family.'

The coroner agreed and recorded an open verdict.

'I have a picture of a kindly, gentle, courteous family man whose primary concern was his wife and children,' he said.

'But on this day he didn't care. He did a deliberate act affected, I have no doubt, by the taking of Seroxat.'

Afterwards, Mrs Whitfield said: 'As a result of what the coroner said in court, I really hope something big will come out of this. I hope there will be restrictions on the drug's use because I believe it is very risky.'

Solicitor Mark Harvey, who is representing thousands of claimants, including Mrs Whitfield, in their planned legal action against the drug's makers, said new prescriptions should cease while the drug's safety was examined.

'This case demonstrates our belief that anyone of note who comes across Seroxat expresses concern about what they see,' he added.

GlaxoSmithKline, which manufactures Seroxat, offered its 'sincere condolences' to Mr Whitfield's family but insisted the drug was safe.

It pointed out that those suffering from depression were more likely to commit suicide.

'There is no valid scientific research or literature finding that Seroxat causes suicidal thoughts or acts,' it added.

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The feelgood formula

Seroxat was launched in Britain 13 years ago as a treatment for depression.

Like its well-known rival Prozac, it works by enhancing the brain's levels of serotonin, a naturally occurring 'feelgood' chemical.

There have already been several cases in the U.S. against makers GlaxoSmithKline. Nearly two years ago a jury in Wyoming ordered the company to pay £4million to the relatives of Donald Schell.

The 60-year-old, who had been taking the drug for just two days, killed his wife, daughter and granddaughter before turning a gun on himself.

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