



NHS approval for weight-loss drug

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A controversial weight-loss drug has been approved for use by the NHS despite concerns over psychological side effects.

Rimonabant was launched in 2006 and last month the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) reported 2,123 reports of individual adverse reactions, of which 974 involved psychiatric disorders and 48 involved suicidal thoughts.

A further 93 involved depression and 32 panic attacks while others included affected sleep and moods.

The National Institute for health and Clinical Excellence (Nice) has approved the drug for NHS patients who cannot take, or who have had no success with, the drugs orlistat and sibutramine.

Rimonabant has not been authorised for use in the US due to safety fears, but the UK, Germany, and France are the biggest users worldwide.

The Nice guidance recommends rimonabant "as an addition to diet and exercise for adults who are obese or overweight and who have had an inadequate response to, are intolerant of or are contraindicated to orlistat and sibutramine".

Orlistat is also known by the brand name Xenical while sibutramine is also known as Reductil.

The guidance said treatment with rimonabant should be continued beyond six months only if the person has lost at least 5 per cent of their initial body weight since starting on the drug.

In July last year, the European Medicines Agency warned that Rimonabant may be unsafe for patients also taking anti-depressants.

Evidence suggested one in ten people taking the drug, whose brand name is Acomplia, may develop mental side-effects including low mood and depression, anxiety, irritability, nervousness and sleep disorders.

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