

Obesity drug withdrawn over depression link

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Sales and prescriptions of a weight-loss drug were suspended yesterday after European health authorities said the benefits no longer outweighed the risks.

The European Medicines Agency said obese people taking Acomplia were roughly twice as likely to develop psychiatric disorders, such as depression, anxiety and aggression, than those taking a placebo. US authorities have refused to allow Acomplia to be marketed in America.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), which oversees drugs in the UK, said that as a result of the ruling, healthcare professionals would be told not to give any new prescriptions for Acomplia. Patients taking the drug have been told to consult their doctor.

Acomplia is a brand name for rimonabant, which helps obese patients to lose weight by suppressing their appetite. It has been authorised in the EU since 2006 to be used alongside diet and exercise to treat obese or overweight patients and has been "moderately effective".

Between June and August this year, five patients who were taking the drug as part of a trial involving 36,000 people committed suicide. One person taking the placebo committed suicide.

Manufacturer Sanofi-Aventis said it would comply with the request to temporarily suspend marketing the drug and added that it would provide additional evidence from clinical trials to help with the re-evaluation of Acomplia. It said 700,000 people worldwide had used Acomplia.