



# CARDIOVASCULAR NEWS

## Lipitor® Reduces Coronary Events

A new study, the Anglo-Scandinavian Cardiac Outcomes Trial (ASCOT), showed that patients with mildly elevated cholesterol levels who took the cholesterol-lowering drug Lipitor® (atorvastatin calcium), had 36% fewer fatal coronary events and non-fatal heart attacks than patients treated with placebo. These patients also experienced a 27% reduction in fatal and non-fatal strokes, as well as a 21% reduction in cardiovascular events and procedures.

The ASCOT study involved 19,342 patients with high blood pressure and was designed to determine whether newer blood pressure-lowering regimens produce greater cardiovascular benefits than older regimens. ASCOT co-chair, Peter Sever, said that these results could potentially impact how this patient population is treated. "Patients with high blood pressure and mildly elevated cholesterol are not routinely considered for cholesterol-lowering therapy," he said.

Reduction in heart attacks and strokes shown in hypertensive patients treated with Lipitor®. Kirkland (Quebec). April 2, 2003.

## Scientific Advances for Canada

The University of Ottawa Heart Institute recently celebrated the scientific funding of its Positron Emission Tomography (PET) Centre. The project was a result of the innovation of the numerous funding partners who collectively invested \$5.9 million, making Canada's only cardiac PET Centre a reality. Research partners include the Canada Foundation for Innovation, the Ontario Innovation Trust, Ontario Research and Development Challenge Fund, the Premier's Research Excellence Fund, the Heart Institute, and the Heart Institute Foundation.

Cardiac PET is a research and diagnostic tool that can identify the extent of heart disease by providing three-dimensional images of the heart, showing which parts of the muscle can be revived or rejuvenated.

Scientific community takes a bow and launches International Cardiac Imaging Symposium. Ottawa (Ontario). March 26, 2003.

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## Are Estrogen Patches Less Risky Than Pills?

In a first head-to-head comparison of estrogen pills and transdermal estrogen patches, the pills were shown to increase the risk of heart disease, while the patches did not. The new, three-part study, published in the April issue of the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, involved 21 post-menopausal women. These women alternated between taking estrogen pills, estrogen patches, and placebo. Of the three regimens, only the estrogen pills raised the level of C-reactive protein (CRP), a protein which is considered a marker and is associated with higher risk of heart disease. On average, eight weeks of oral estrogen doubled CRP levels.

It is important to note, however, that the study did not look at the long-term effects of actual heart disease events. Dr. Cynthia Stuenkel, one of the researchers involved with this study, said she would be cautious in labelling transdermal patches the lesser of two evils, as, in this study, CRP is simply a surrogate marker and not a clinical outcome.

Could heart risks of estrogen replacement be "patched" up? Bethesda (Maryland). April 8, 2003.

## Vasotec® Reduces Diabetes in Heart Failure Patients

In a study conducted by the Montreal Heart Institute, Vasotec® (enalapril), a drug used to treat hypertension and heart failure, substantially reduced the incidence of new cases of diabetes in patients suffering from heart disease. The controlled, randomised, multicentre, double-blind trial involved 291 patients and was intended to determine the effects of Vasotec on the survival of patients with left ventricular dysfunction. Of the patients in the study, 153 received Vasotec and 138 received a placebo. There was a mean followup of three years, in which time, 22.4% of patients in the placebo group developed diabetes compared with only 5.9% of patients in the Vasotec group. The beneficial effect was even more important in patients with abnormal fasting plasma glucose levels. In this subgroup, diabetes appeared in only 3.9% of patients treated with Vasotec compared with 48% in the placebo group.

"The results of our study with the angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor Vasotec are most encouraging and should be very useful for the treatment of high-risk patients," commented Dr. Jean-Claude Tardif, the study's principal investigator.

Montreal Heart Institute study finds drug enalapril reduces incidence of diabetes in patients with heart failure. Montreal (Quebec). March 11, 2003.