

Bowel Drug Pulled-Linked to Deaths

Pharmaceutical giant Glaxo Wellcome pulled its bowel drug Lotronex today after discussions with the Food and Drug Administration to keep it on the market failed. The company says it will stop selling Lotronex, or alosetron hydrochloride, in the United States. The product was approved last February for the treatment of women with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) accompanied by diarrhea, but has run into trouble with side effects.

The FDA says it has learned of 70 cases of serious bowel complications in patients who used the drug through early November. Most of these involved ischemic colitis, a potentially deadly problem in which the large intestine gets starved of blood.

Earlier this year, the consumer group Public Citizen called on the FDA to remove the drug. Many patients who suffered adverse events required hospitalization, and five died, though investigators aren't sure the fatalities were caused by Lotronex, according to the FDA. Two other deaths of patients on the drug were not linked to either ischemic colitis or severe constipation, the other main side effect of Lotronex.