

HEALTH

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Five Brands of Risk

Now That an FDA Official Has Voiced Concerns About A Group of Popular Medications, Some Patients Who Take Them Are Seeking Safer Options

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It's been a tough couple of weeks for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and pharmaceutical companies. But it's also been difficult for the millions of people who are taking any of five medications cited as potentially dangerous at a Nov. 18 Senate hearing.

That hearing was held to explore the FDA's record on warning people about drug risks. During his testimony, David J. Graham, associate director of the FDA's office of drug safety, said underpublicized safety risks of five drugs—weight loss medication Meridia; acne drug Accutane; asthma medication Serevent; cholesterol drug Crestor; and

painkiller Bextra—could lead to restrictions or withdrawal of the drugs from the market.

More than 15 million prescriptions were filled for the five drugs during the first nine months of this year, according to IMS Health, a pharmaceutical information and health care consulting company. While the makers rigorously defend the drugs' safety when taken as directed, some people who take them are scared.

Michael Miller, director of the Center for Preventive Cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore, said at least 10 patients have called asking what to do. While some research suggests that Crestor carries greater risk of serious side effects than other statins, Miller said

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BY TANNEN MAURY / BLOOMBERG NEWS

The five medications that FDA drug safety official David J. Graham said have underpublicized risks: the statin drug Crestor, the Serevent asthma drug, painkiller Bextra, diet drug Meridia and acne medication Accutane. Makers defend the drugs' safety, but pa-

