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FDA approves new diabetes/heart drug studied at UM

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University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations, "FDA approves new diabetes/heart drug studied at UM" (1999). *University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present*. 16169.
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NEWS RELEASE

This release is available electronically on INN (News Net.)

Sept. 15, 1999

Contact: Vernon Grund, pharmaceutical sciences professor, (406) 243-4770.

FDA APPROVES NEW DIABETES/HEART DRUG STUDIED AT UM

MISSOULA--

The Food and Drug Administration recently approved a new drug for Type II diabetes that has been under investigation for several years in pharmaceutical sciences labs at The University of Montana.

The drug, Actos or pioglitazone hydrochloride, also may reduce the risk of cardiovascular complications, which is extremely important in the treatment of diabetes.

“The risk of heart disease in diabetics is much greater than in normal individuals,” said pharmaceutical sciences Professor Vernon Grund, principal investigator on the project.

“Diabetes is not merely a disorder involving blood sugar. It also involves blood fats and makes the fat in your blood -- LDL cholesterol -- more easily stick in the arteries. Diabetes increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes just as smoking and high blood pressure do.”

Since 1997 the FDA has approved three new drugs of the Actos class that are targeted for noninsulin-dependent diabetics who gain weight and suffer from insulin resistance, Grund said. Insulin resistance is closely associated with obesity, high blood pressure and high lipid levels, all of which are risk factors for heart disease and stroke, he said.

Grund conducted the studies on special Zucker Diabetic Fatty rats that rapidly gain

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weight and spontaneously develop insulin resistance and Type II diabetes. Blood fat levels in these animals, especially triglycerides and cholesterol, also soar to levels as much as seven times the normal. Grund found that pioglitazone normalizes triglycerides and blood sugar after only two weeks of treatment. Blood cholesterol levels also fall even though the rats are quite obese.

Grund's research was sponsored by the American Heart Association. Others working on the project included pharmaceutical sciences Associate Professor Jerry Smith and graduate student Heather Fraser. Grund's original project, "Pharmacologic Intervention With Cardiovascular Complications of Type II Diabetes," was funded by the association's local affiliate in 1994-96.

Actos will be marketed in the United States by Takeda Chemical Industries Ltd. of Japan in a joint agreement with Eli Lilly and Co. of Indianapolis. The Upjohn Company, the U.S. company originally affiliated with Takeda, supported Grund's research on the drug in 1992 but pulled out of its agreement when early reports in animal studies indicated that the drug may cause cardiac enlargement. In his studies, Grund found that the drug had no bad effects on cardiac performance despite slight increases in heart size.

While this new drug is good news for diabetics, Grund said there still is no substitute for proper exercise, nutrition and weight control in the fight against heart disease and diabetes. A runner and fitness buff himself, he has only six states to go to realize his dream of running in all 50 states.

Grund was recently elected to a two-year term as president of the American Heart Association's Northwest Affiliate, which takes in Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Idaho and

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Montana. He's chaired UM's pharmaceutical sciences department since 1992, and under his leadership it has increased research funding more than seven-fold to well over \$1 million annually. The department also is closely affiliated with The International Heart Institute of Montana Foundation.

UM is a major sponsor of this year's American Heart Walk to be held Saturday, Sept. 18, at Southgate Mall. Check-in will begin at 8 a.m. in the J.C. Penney court. The walk raises money to support, education and community service.

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