

## MARKETPLACE

## DRUGS

## A Stampede Is on for Impotence Pill

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In just two weeks on the market, Pfizer Inc.'s impotence pill Viagra is already one of the fastest-selling drugs in the history of medicine.

Men of all ages are rushing to their doctors' offices to get the newly approved drug. Doctors are obliging with tens of thousands of prescriptions a day, according to market sources. That places Viagra in the blockbuster league with such established top sellers as the antidepressant Prozac. And, like Prozac and the recalled weight-loss drug Redux, Viagra's market appears to be far bigger than just the seriously afflicted patients who clinically qualify for the drug. Just as plenty of mildly depressed people pressure their doctors for Prozac, so too are men seeking to boost their potency with Viagra.

"The sales are unbelievable," says Hemant Shah, an independent drug-industry analyst in Warren, N.J. "It's not just a pharmaceutical product, it's a social phenomenon." He was skeptical of Viagra before it came out, but now thinks it could be one of the biggest sellers ever.

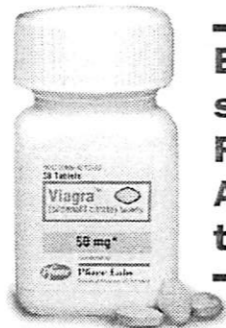
Even Web sites are reporting huge interest. One site is giving prescriptions to patients sight-unseen, a practice that is legal but is considered questionable by many doctors.

Pfizer hasn't officially begun market-

ing the drug to doctors or with advertising. Yet some 15,000 to 20,000 prescriptions a day are being written for Viagra, according to Mr. Shah, who bases his estimate on data from Source Informatics, a Phoenix market-research firm that was recently

data started to trickle out to investors on Friday. Pfizer stock rose 4.5%, or \$4.50, to close at \$105.1875, following a 3% run-up on Thursday.

Whether the juggernaut can possibly be sustained is unknown. If sales continue at



**BESIEGED DOCTORS are writing some 40,000 prescriptions a day for Pfizer's Viagra, by some estimates. And not everyone clamoring to try the drug is clinically impotent.**

acquired by National Data Corp. Source Informatics's data come from computer readouts of insurance-company reimbursement requests from pharmacies.

Prescriptions paid for in cash, which probably account for half of all sales, could bring the number of daily prescriptions to 40,000 or more, analysts say. By comparison, nearly 70,000 prescriptions of Prozac are sold each day, according to Scott-Levin, a Newtown, Pa., market-research firm.

As rumors of the strong initial sales

the current pace, Viagra—which retails for \$10 a pill—could have annual sales of about \$1 billion, making it one of the world's best sellers. However, a number of doctors caution that pent-up demand, following weeks of news that Food and Drug Administration approval was imminent, may have caused a disproportionate surge of interest, both from first-time impotence patients and those switching from other therapies. They note that other drugs, notably Rogaine for baldness and Redux for weight loss, fizzled after early popular-

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ity.

"I guarantee there will be a backlash against Pfizer in six months, when people find out this doesn't work on everyone and has side effects," says James Barada, a urologist at the Center for Male Sexual Health in Albany, N.Y.

Viagra's side effects in clinical trials so far have been mostly mild. They include headache, indigestion and sometimes a temporary blue tinge to the patient's vision.

Other researchers warn that trouble could lie ahead if the drug is overprescribed. "My guess is that some unanticipated side effect will emerge" because of the heavy use, says Stanley Korenman, a urologist at the University of California at Los Angeles. "People without erectile dysfunction will use it to have sex five times in a night. They will take it too frequently and at too high a dose, and then get into big trouble."

For now, some doctors say they are getting more requests for Viagra than they can handle, and before they have received feedback from patients about how well it works. Ira D. Sharlip, a San Francisco urologist and leading impotence doctor, wrote more than 100 prescriptions for Viagra in the last week. He has been working until 10 p.m. every night responding to patient telephone inquiries. And he is still 30 calls behind.

Dr. Sharlip says he has had to turn down several friends who don't meet the clinical criteria for impotence. "They say, 'I'm 50 now, and it's not quite what it used to be. Do you think I could do even better?'" he says. "I tell them you can't take a 50-year-old man and make him 20 years old." Other doctors note that wives, too, are driving demand for Viagra.

Viagra was first developed by Pfizer in the early 1990s as a treatment for angina, a heart condition. But when users reported that the drug improved their ability to have erections, Pfizer turned its efforts in that direction. According to government estimates, 30 million men suffer some degree of impotence, often as a result of illnesses such as diabetes.

Previous impotence treatments required injections or cumbersome devices, making the Viagra pill attractive by comparison. The drug doesn't stimulate de-

sire, and must be taken about an hour before being aroused. It works by blocking an enzyme, phosphodiesterase 5, that makes erections subside. Neil Brooks, the president of the American Academy of Family Physicians who practices in Rockville, Conn., says about 75% of his Viagra patients have been unwilling to try other treatments. "When they heard the pill was coming out, they said they would wait until it was available," he says.

Urologist Irwin Goldstein of Boston University, an investigator of the drug in its early trials, says he is seeing as many as 70 patients a day to determine whether they qualify for Viagra. Between existing patients who want to be switched from injectable medication to Viagra, and the 50 or more new patients who have been calling each day, his office is booked through June.

Dr. Goldstein has also prescribed the drug to about two-dozen postmenopausal women, to see if it can relieve vaginal dryness, which can make intercourse uncomfortable. Pfizer also is testing Viagra to see if it can help women with sexual dysfunction.

John W. Weigel, a urologist at the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City, wrote more than 20 prescriptions for Viagra last Thursday alone. "My arm is getting tired," he says. "I've been around a long time, but I've never seen anything like this."

While many doctors are optimistic about Viagra's promise, George W. Adams Jr., a urologist in Birmingham, Ala., says some of his patients need a reality check. "They think it's a miracle drug," he says. Some have already found out it isn't: "I had a patient call me at home last night during dinner to let me know it didn't work," he says.

The giddiness over Viagra reminds New York pharmacist Manny Norona of an earlier patient stampede to Rogaine. Most of the Viagra inquiries he is getting come directly from patients. The very next day, he says, their doctors will phone in their prescriptions.

Some patients are bypassing doctors' offices entirely in favor of the Web site [www.penisipill.com](http://www.penisipill.com). Operated by the Vascular Center for Men, a Milwaukee medical center specializing in treating male sexual problems, promises results to those