

Viagra may work for women as well as men

By JOHN HENDREN
Associated Press

NEW YORK — For nearly a month, Viagra has helped hundreds of thousands of American men satisfy long-frustrated libidos.

Now it may be women's turn.

Already, a Boston University study is examining whether the new impotence pill for men might restore lost sex lives for women. And the drug's manufacturer, New York-based Pfizer Inc., is testing the drug on 500 women in England.

A participant in the Boston study, 39-year-old Baltimore hairdresser Laurie Kline, tried Viagra on Wednesday and said she had her first orgasm since her hysterectomy five years ago.

"It was really wonderful," she said. "It was like it used to be — maybe

even a little bit better. It seemed like my body was back to what it used to be."

Before Viagra, she said, "three different gynecologists told me it was in my head. I was surprised at how strong the belief was that the problem wasn't physical."

Researchers believe that just as prostate surgery and diabetes can lead to impotence in men, hysterectomies, high cholesterol and age can interfere with blood flow in women, giving them a numb sensation during sex and making it difficult for them to be stimulated.

In men, Viagra acts on an enzyme prevalent in the penis to boost blood flow. Researchers believe the drug also boosts blood flow to the vagina, increasing a woman's lubrication and sensitivity to stimulation.

Viagra has been approved by the

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Food and Drug Administration for men only, but doctors are free to prescribe it any way they see fit as long as they believe there's a medical reason.

Introduced three weeks ago, Viagra has become a runaway pharma-

ceutical bestseller, already generating almost a quarter-million prescriptions, according to industry reports.

Pfizer, however, isn't promoting Viagra for women and cannot do so without running afoul of FDA regulations.

"We're only recommending it be taken by men," Pfizer spokesman Andy McCormick said. "We spent four or five years and probably tested about 4,500 men to get the FDA approval on safety and efficacy, so in men we know it's safe and effective. We don't have that knowledge on the drug for women."

Kline's urologist, Dr. Jennifer Berman of the University of Maryland, recently was awarded an \$88,000 grant from the American Foundation for Urologic Diseases to study the effect of Viagra and other drugs on

women's sexual dysfunction, the first such grant.

Already women are beginning to seek treatment.

Robin Lyles, a 39-year-old Germantown, Md., woman who noticed her sexual performance decline markedly after her hysterectomy in June, is trying to get accepted into the Boston University study.

"If it's something that's going to help me the way I need it to help me, I'll take the risk," she said. "I want to be a sort of guinea pig."

Women who want the \$10-a-pill drug probably will have to pay for it. Insurance companies usually don't pay for a drug unless the FDA has specifically approved it for the ailment being treated.

But Berman said: "Regardless of that, they're still willing to pay for it and they're lining up."

Eli Lilly studying ways to market impotency drugs

By KEN KUSMER
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Eli Lilly & Co. is studying ways it can bring a male impotency treatment to market, either by developing its own drug or collaborating with a partner, its top science officer said yesterday.

The intense interest in the new Pfizer drug Viagra has prompted Lilly and other drug makers to see whether they too can cash in on a market that's estimated at 30 million — men with potency problems. Since Viagra entered the market in April, the number of American men seeking any prescription treatments each week has jumped sixfold.

Lilly officials also have begun discussions on possibly developing a research area devoted to men's health, Dr. August Watanabe, executive vice president of science and technology, said during a news briefing for the opening of the company's new clinical laboratory in Indianapolis.

"We are looking at that situation very carefully and evaluating whether or not it makes sense for us to be in this area. Clearly it is an area of unmet medical needs," Watanabe said.

Lilly does not have any impotency drugs in development, and developing one from scratch would take eight to 10 years, Watanabe said. A faster way for Lilly to enter the lucrative field would be to collaborate with another company that already

has a drug in development, he said.

Viagra sales could top \$3 billion by 2002, Deutsche Morgan Grenfell analyst Mariola Hagggar estimates. By comparison, Lilly's best-selling drug, the antidepressant Prozac, had \$2.56 billion in sales last year.

The new estrogen replacement, Evista, is being marketed by a new women's health unit formed by Lilly last August. A complementary unit focusing on men's health could be formed around an unidentified prostate cancer drug Lilly has begun clinical studies on, Watanabe said.

It was partly Lilly's growing interest in the effects of its drugs on women that drove the need for the Lilly Laboratory for Clinical Research. Drug companies historically tested new medicines primarily on male volunteers and only in recent years have recruited women for tests on drugs used by both sexes, Watanabe said. Women now make up about 40 percent of Lilly's clinical study volunteers.

However, Lilly's former lab did not have separate sleeping quarters for men and women, and volunteers are housed there for periods ranging from 72 hours to eight weeks.

The \$17 million new lab opened in February on two floors of an outpatient center at the Indiana University Medical Center in Indianapolis. At 90,000 square feet, it's about the same size as the 72-year-old former lab at nearby Wishard Hospital.