

Pioglitazone May Be Associated with Increased Risk of Bladder Cancer

On December 12, 2016, the FDA advised healthcare professionals that the use of pioglitazone, a medication for type 2 diabetes, may be associated with an increased risk of bladder cancer. Pioglitazone is an oral tablet used in the treatment of type 2 diabetes in adults. This is an update following an alert from the FDA in August 2011 based on preliminary information from a 10-year study done by the manufacturer of pioglitazone. The study findings at the point of the initial alert were that there was not an increased risk of bladder cancer associated with the use of pioglitazone, but there was an increased risk of bladder cancer associated with increased dose and duration of pioglitazone use. There is conflicting data surfacing about whether an increased risk of bladder cancer is associated with pioglitazone use, but the FDA has concluded that there is. The package label of pioglitazone already contains warnings about the increased risk associated with increased dose and duration, but further updates have been approved to describe the additional studies.

Patients with bladder cancer will often have blood in their urine, but no pain. Hematuria is not specific to bladder cancer, so the physician will have to do an exam to rule out other conditions such as urinary tract infection, renal or prostate cancer, interstitial cystitis, benign prostatic hyperplasia and trauma. In addition to a physical exam to check for flank pain and the presence of masses, a urine specimen should be collected, with a urinalysis and culture both performed to check for infection. A CT urogram should be performed in patients with adequate kidney function and a urologist should perform a cystoscopy to look inside the urethra and bladder. If bladder cancer is suspected, or if a patient has a history of bladder cancer, pioglitazone should not be used.

References:

- Information for Healthcare Professionals. Pioglitazone. FDA. Available at: <https://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/ucm519616.htm>
- Farling, KB. Bladder cancer: Risk factors, diagnosis, and management. Nurse Practitioner. 2017; 42(3):26-33.

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