

Glaxo didn't tell of Paxil recall

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GlaxoSmithKline Plc recalled Paxil CR antidepressants last month because the pills may have lacked an active ingredient, and didn't warn patients.

Glaxo doesn't know how many of the 7.5-million recalled pills were missing paroxetine hydrochloride, or how many patients took the pills, spokesman Michael Fleming said in a telephone interview Wednesday. Glaxo didn't tell patients because testing on a later lot suggested as few as one of the pills lacked the key ingredient.

Doctors said the lack of a warning could mean that patients may face a sudden withdrawal that can spur suicidal thoughts, shooting pain and flu-like symptoms. The Paxil CR pills Glaxo recalled can cause severe withdrawal symptoms, said Stephen Ellen of the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

"If it is true that patients might have gotten dummy pills without knowing it, it is outrageous," said Ellen, a psychiatrist who operates the Counseling Center of Nashua, N.H.

About 280,000 Americans take Paxil CR, a long-acting version of another Glaxo antidepressant that has lost patent protection, Fleming said. About 14% of those patients take the 37.5-milligram pill that was recalled, he said.

Peter Lurie, deputy director of the health research group at Public Citizen, an advocacy group, said drugmakers can limit the number of returned products in a recall by not advising patients.

"To the extent patients learn of it, they're likely to return distributed inventory and that's going to cost the company money," Lurie said. "This way the company gets to say they did a recall, they dump the responsibility on intermediaries, and the patient most likely hears nothing."