

Lessons from \$800-million drug flop may lead to a new genre of anti-cholesterol medicines

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Mindful of lessons from a failed heart drug that cost \$800 million to develop, drug companies are taking another shot at new medications that boost levels of so-called "good cholesterol," which removes cholesterol from the body. A report on how three new versions of medications in the same family as the failed torcetrapib appears in the current edition of *Chemical & Engineering News*, the newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society, the world's largest scientific society.

In the cover story, C&EN Associate Editor Carmen Drahl explains that the [drug](#) maker Pfizer abruptly stopped development of its newest heart medicine in 2006, when clinical trials showed it was increasing patients' risk of death. Torcetrapib then was a high-profile potential new medication that blocked a substance called cholesteryl ester transfer protein (CETP) in a way expected to increase blood levels of HDL-cholesterol, high-density lipoprotein [cholesterol](#). Experts hoped torcetrapib would open a new chapter in treating heart disease. Data, however, indicated that torcetrapib had increased the risk of death in a 15,000-patient clinical trial, and Pfizer promptly halted further development.

C&EN describes how Eli Lilly, Roche and Merck slowed down development of their own CETP blockers to watch closely for hints unwanted of effects, such as torcetrapib's tendency to increase blood pressure, which Pfizer had missed. So far, the new CETP blockers

continue to show promise as viable new heart drugs. Drahl points out, however, that the final judgment may be years away as results of clinical trials on 30,000 become available.

More information: "The Cholesterol Bet" - cen.acs.org/articles/90/i8/Cholesterol-Bet.html

Provided by American Chemical Society

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