

Therapeutic Trends



Cholesterol Reducers:

Among the World's Top Prescribed Medications

Insight and Outlook from IMS HEALTH

Often called the wonder drugs of the 21st century, statins, a class of cholesterol reducers, were among the world's top prescribed and top-selling medications in 2005. Already shown to be effective at lowering cholesterol, researchers are finding that statins may have other potential benefits.¹

In Canada, cholesterol reducers were the fastest growing among Canada's top 10 prescribed classes in 2005, up 10.2% over the previous year. Lipitor®, a leading statin, was the country's most prescribed and top-selling medication.

Lipitor® also ranked as the world's number one selling medication, with hospital and retail pharmacy purchases of \$12.9 billion US.

LANDMARK SWITCH

Statins were the subject of a revolutionary landmark switch which took place in the United Kingdom (UK).

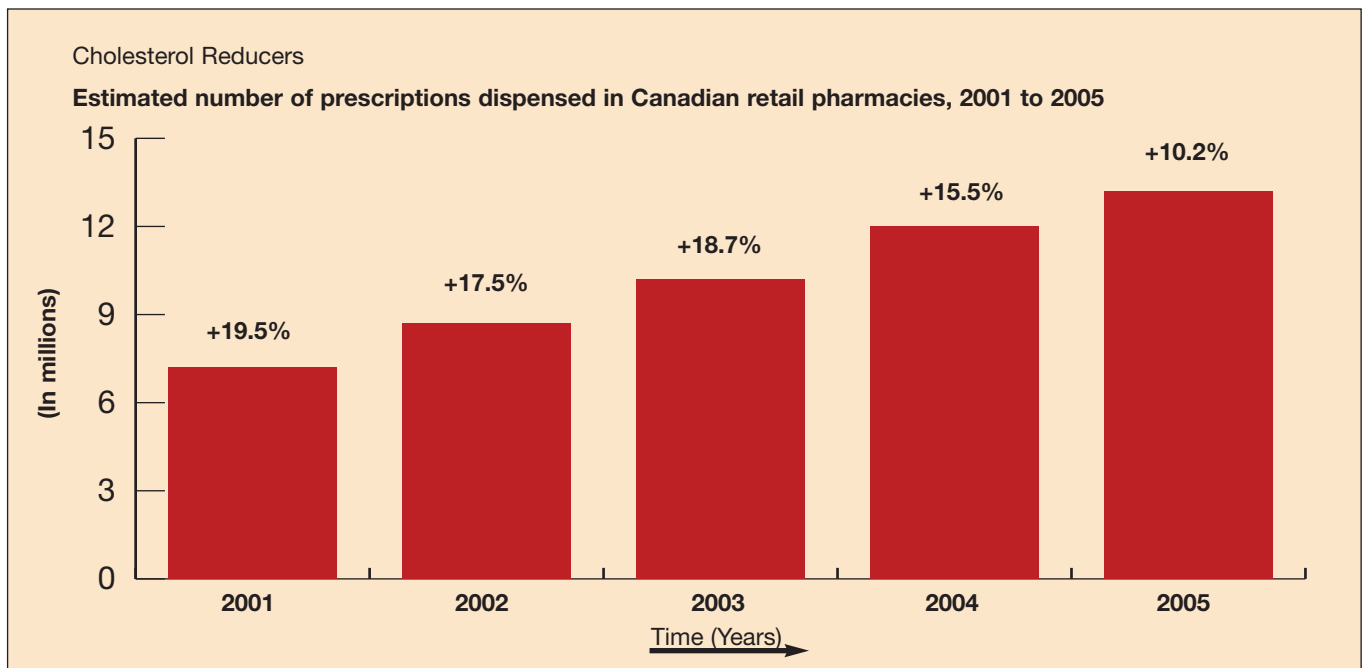
The switch was largely driven by the promise of huge potential health benefits, (*i.e.*, prevention of coronary heart disease).

The UK was the first country to switch a cholesterol reducer from prescription to OTC in 2004. Zocor Heart-Pro® (simvastatin), targeted at individuals with a low-to-moderate risk of heart disease, is available from pharmacists at a daily dosage of 10 mg, following an on-the-spot blood test.

The UK switch of 10 mg simvastatin was revolutionary because it demonstrated a high level of collaboration among the:

- manufacturer,
- government,
- regulatory authorities,
- the pharmacy profession and
- patient groups.

It has opened the door to future switches, especially in asymptomatic conditions requiring ongoing



treatment, such as hypertension.

Early evidence suggests the UK switch of 10 mg simvastatin has not lived up to the significant expectations. However, it may take three years to five years before any health benefits can be measured.

In January 2005, US federal health advisors recommended against OTC sales of a cholesterol drug, claiming that patients needed medical guidance for this chronic condition.

HOW THE DRUGS ACT²

The blood contains several types of fats, or lipids. They are necessary for normal body function, but can be damaging if presented in excess (hyperlipidemia), particularly saturated fats such as cholesterol.

Lipid-lowering drugs reduce the levels of fats in the blood by interfering with the absorption of bile salts in the bowel, or by altering the way in which the liver converts fatty acids in the blood into different types of lipids.

Lipid-lowering drugs do not correct the underlying causes of raised levels of fat in the blood, so it is usually necessary to continue with diet and drug treatment indefinitely. **CPM**

References

1. Mayoclinic.com: Statins: Are These Cholesterol-lowering Drugs Right for You. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/statins/CL00010>
2. Canadian Pharmacists Association: *Guide to Drugs in Canada*. Revised Edition. Dorling Kindersley Ltd, Toronto, 2006.

Table 2
Cholesterol reducers: Prescriptions dispensed by specialty in 2005

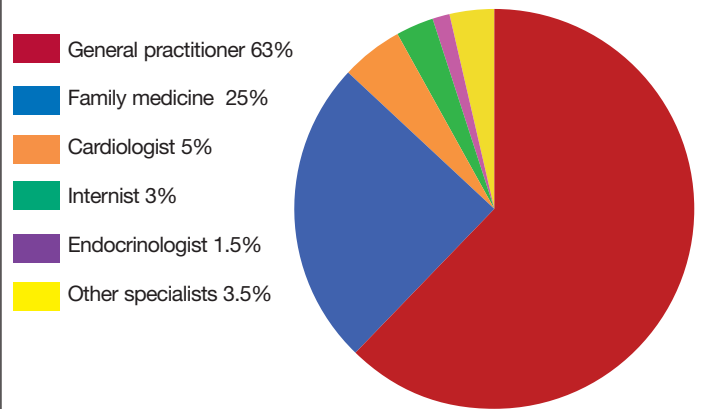


Table 3
Most dispensed cholesterol reducers, 2005

	Prescriptions (in millions)
Total lipid-reducers	22.0
Atorvastatin (Lipitor®)	11.0
Simvastatin (Zocor® and generics)	3.6
Rosuvastatin (Crestor®)	2.4
Pravastatin (Pravachol® and generics)	1.7
Fenofibrate (Lipidil® and generics)	1.5
Ezetimibe	0.5
Lovastatin (Mevacor® and generics)	0.3
Fluvastatin (Lescol®)	0.2
All others	0.4

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