

Panel Backs Asthma Drug

Abbott Laboratories received approval from a Food and Drug Administration advisory panel to sell a new class of asthma drug.

The drug, zileuton, which would be sold under the brand name Leutrol, would inhibit the production of a naturally occurring substance believed to cause inflammation of the airways in the lungs. Food and Drug Administration approval is still required before Abbott can sell the drug, but the agency usually takes the advice of its advisory panels. Abbott, of Abbott Park, Ill., said that studies of patients given Leutrol showed a "significant decrease" in daytime and nighttime asthma symptoms and that the drug was "well tolerated." The company had said its drug was safe and effective, with patients responding two to four weeks after receiving it. Food and Drug Administration scientists expressed concern about potential side effects on the liver. Tests showed that 2.5 percent of patients experienced an elevation of liver enzymes above three times normal levels. Abbott wants the labeling of the product to suggest that doctors monitor the livers of patients using it. The panel agreed, recommending liver tests every two weeks at the start of therapy.