

Times May 6th 2017

The merits and drawbacks of Roaccutane

Sir, Ed Vaizey (Thunderer, May 4) is, of course, right to insist that patients and their parents receive all relevant information regarding the acne drug Roaccutane. However, he does them no service by seeking to go beyond that guidance and casting unnecessary doubt on the treatment.

As a teenager in the early 1990s my acne was so severe that it would not have been possible to place a pin on any part of my body from the waist up and hit unaffected skin. I slept in a pool of blood each night, in constant pain. It was horrific, as was my quality of life while the NHS ran through every cheaper solution over several years to no avail before eventually offering me Roaccutane. My condition at that emotionally vulnerable time of life left me questioning whether I should go on at all. It is no exaggeration to say that Roaccutane saved my life.

The drug cleared up my acne almost completely in very short order and my outlook on life improved with it. We should be very careful not to demonise a valuable medical treatment given that the vulnerable people who benefit from it are silent but numerous. The guidance provided with the medicine and a GP's supervision should be sufficient to ensure that this lifesaving drug continues to benefit those in desperate need of it.

MATTHEW KNOWLES
Fleet, Hants

Sir, You report figures from the MHRA that between 2012 and 2014 20 people took their lives while on Roaccutane ("Acne treatment made our son suicidal, say bereaved parents", News, May 3).

Surely even one life is one too many for this drug to be made available? We witnessed the side-effects of Roaccutane first-hand with our own son last year after he was prescribed it. He became anxious and depressed and started making excuses not to see his friends almost immediately upon taking the drug. Luckily for us there appears to be no long-term damage. I pointed this out to the consultant, who referred me to the warnings on the medication.

ROB CARTER
Hertford

Sir, At the age of 20 I am taking a second course of Roaccutane, having unsuccessfully tried all other antibiotics available to treat severe acne for seven years. Its effectiveness is unprecedented and my confidence is higher than ever, as I am less self-conscious about my appearance.

Dermatologists involved in my treatment warned me about potential side-effects before starting each course of treatment, with a particular focus on mental health, depression and suicide. Throughout I have had regular appointments so that doctors can follow my progress and ensure that I am not suffering adversely from

the treatment. I have not suffered any of the serious side-effects that Roaccutane can cause and have no second thoughts about taking it.

FIONA KENYON
Guildford, Surrey

Sir, Ed Vaizey's article will cause unnecessary anxiety to all the patients who have been on the treatment, as well as their families. I have treated hundreds of severe-acne patients with this drug, some of whom were suicidal because of their acne problem, and others who as well as severe acne have longstanding mental problems unrelated to their spots. They have without fail been delighted with their clear skin.

DR KLAUS J MISCH, FRCP
Epsom, Surrey

Sir, Before jumping on the bandwagon of curbing the already closely regulated use of Roaccutane Ed Vaizey might consider the views of my consultant dermatologist, that depression and suicidal behaviour may be caused by having severe acne rather than by side-effects from the drug that is trying to treat it.

I was lucky enough to be placed on Roaccutane when it was piloted in this country in the 1980s; its only psychological impact was promoting wellbeing at finally clearing up this socially debilitating ailment.

ADAM BOULTON
Sky News presenter