Drug Safety: It's a Learning Process

Vanessa Eng
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VANESSA ENG*

INTRODUCTION

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved every drug currently on the market after successfully completing a complex multi-stage review and approval process.1 Beginning an investigational new drug application (IND), a drug must complete three phases of clinical trials.2 Phase I studies assess how the human body metabolizes low doses of the drug and the resulting side effects.3 Phase II measures the efficacy and safety of the drug in a small number of patients who suffer from the targeted illness or condition.4 In Phase III, drug sponsors must provide FDA with substantial evidence confirming their successful Phase II results.

* J.D. Candidate, Class of 2009, St. John’s University School of Law; B.A. Economics 2006, SUNY at Binghamton.


3 See 21 C.F.R. § 312.21(a) (2008) (stating the phase one requirements for approval of an IND).

4 See generally Steenburg, supra note 2, at 296 (discussing the origin of the multi-stage review and explaining the three requisite phases).

5 See 21 C.F.R. § 312.21(b) (2008) (“Phase 2 includes the controlled clinical studies conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the drug for a particular indication or indications in patients with the disease or condition under study . . . .”); see also Steenburg, supra note 2, at 296 (“Phase II trials evaluate both efficacy and safety in a small number of patients who actually suffer from the ailment that the investigational drug targets.”).

6 See 21 C.F.R. § 312.21(c) (2008) (“Phase 3 studies are expanded controlled and uncontrolled trials. They are performed after preliminary evidence suggesting effectiveness of the drug has been obtained . . . .”); see also Steenburg, supra note 2, at 297 (“Phase III studies are significantly larger investigations that seek to confirm the results of successful Phase II trials . . . .”).

7 See Steenburg, supra note 2, at 296–97 (discussing the steps for approving the drug for marketing after the three phases); see also About the Food and Drug Administration, supra note 1 (stating that new drugs which successfully complete the approval process may be marketed with the consent of the FDA).
with a significantly larger patient-base. After Phase III, the FDA may make a determination allowing the drug to be marketed.

But what happens to the drug after approval? Despite the rigorous testing and monitoring that occurs pre-approval, the most serious adverse effects arise after the drug is made available to the general population. Therefore, postmarketing surveillance should be treated as an essential follow-up to the approval process. The FDA’s current postmarketing regulation consists of Phase IV study commitments, and an adverse events reporting system (AERS). Postmarketing commitments are aimed at ensuring a drug’s safety after approval, while the purpose of AERS is to detect patterns of actual or potential adverse events. However, this postmarketing surveillance system is far from perfect. Regardless of its status as the world’s leading pharmaceutical regulatory agency, the FDA

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7 See Stephen J. Schanz, Pharmaceutical Postmarket Review: Fact or Fiction?, 62 FOOD & DRUG L.J. 493, 493 (2007) (discussing the necessity for strong controls and monitoring of new drugs after they have been cleared for marketing); see also David A. Kessler & David C. Vladeck, Health Regulation and Governance: A Critical Examination of the FDA’s Efforts to Preempt Failure-to-Warn Claims, 96 GEO. L.J. 461, 490 (2008) (remarking on the shortcomings of the post marketing monitoring process of newly approved FDA drugs).

8 See Schanz, supra note 7, at 495 (contending that “postmarket surveillance is an important adjunct to the approval process which cannot be ignored”); see also Steenburg, supra note 2, at 298 (considering former FDA Commissioner George Larrick’s testimony that the “‘early period following general marketing of a drug may be regarded as a final step in the testing of a product’” (quoting Drug Safety (Part One): Hearings Before a Subcomm. of the H. Comm. on Government Operations, 88th Cong. 152 (1964) (statement of George P. Larrick, Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration)).

9 See Schanz, supra note 7, at 494 (highlighting the importance of the two components); see also Kessler & Vladeck, supra note 7, at 489 (discussing the steps in the post approval monitoring process of the drug).

10 See Schanz, supra note 7, at 494 (“The objective in carrying out and evaluating these trials is to determine how safe and effective the drug is and whether it qualifies for market approval.”); see also Kessler & Vladeck, supra note 7, at 489 (“[T]he FDA [has] authority to require Phase IV studies for drugs already approved if the FDA makes a determination that ‘new safety information’ shows an unexpected risk that cannot be addressed through other controls.”).

11 See Rosalie A. Bright, Strategy for Surveillance of Adverse Drug Events, 62 FOOD & DRUG L.J. 605, 605 (2007) (“The main goal of drug surveillance is to obtain warnings of previously unidentified adverse drug events (ADE) and to detect patterns of actual or potential ADE.”); see also Lance L. Shea et al., Cause and Effect? Assessing Postmarketing Safety Studies as Evidence of Causation in Products Liability Cases, 62 FOOD & DRUG L.J. 445, 446-47 (2007) (“[A]dverse event reports are helpful in directing further inquiry by detecting possible signals of unusual adverse events or unusual numbers of common adverse events.”).

12 See Katharine Neckers, Harmonization of Drug and Medical Device Development in the US and Japan: Movement Towards International Cooperation in the Postgenomic Era, 12 NEW ENG. J. INT’L & COMP. L. 295, 302 (2006) (characterizing and listing a majority of the current shortcomings within the current surveillance system); see also Bert Black & Keith Altman, Deciphering the Adverse Event Reporting System, 41 TRIAL 36, 40 (2005) (acknowledging that the voluntary nature of the AERS and unstandardized criteria that doctors use in determining whether an adverse reaction should be reported can make the quality of AERS reports uneven).

13 See Steenburg, supra note 2, at 299 (tagging the FDA as the “world’s first regulator to decide whether to send a given drug out into commerce”); see also Lars Noah, One Decade of Food and Drug
may stand to learn from its two main competitors: the European Union (EU) and Japan. Both the EU and Japan consider postmarket monitoring of drugs as a top priority; each taking strong measures to ensure drug safety. The EU’s “pharmacovigilance” system threatens liability if certain postmarketing regulations are not complied with. Japan targets the early stages in postmarketing surveillance and requires early adverse reaction reports, as well as early clinical investigations and studies. With the FDA’s problems of enforcing compliance from pharmaceutical companies’ underreporting of adverse events and overall monitoring, postmarketing surveillance in the U.S. would greatly improve if the FDA emulated certain aspects of the EU and Japanese postmarketing surveillance systems.

Part I of this note will provide background on the FDA’s statutory authority. It will outline the Food and Drug Administration Modernization Act of 1997, and the authority that the FDA derives from it. This section will focus on the two key aspects of postmarket pharmaceutical regulation—postmarketing study commitments and adverse event reporting, and their

Law Scholarship: A Selected Bibliography, 55 Food & Drug L.J. 641, 641 (2000) (noting that the FDA is a significant regulatory agency because it regulates products that account for 25 percent of consumer expenditures).

See Justina A. Molzon, The International Conference on Harmonization Common Technical Document – Global Submission Format?, 60 Food & Drug L.J. 447, 447 (2005) (explaining that in 1990, the United States, Western Europe, and Japan formed the International Conference on Harmonization of Technical Requirements for Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH) mainly because the majority of drugs and medicines were developed in these three regions); see also Rosemarie Kanusky, Pharmaceutical Harmonization: Standardizing Regulations Among the United States, the European Economic Community, and Japan, 16 Hous. J. Int’l L. 665, 676–88 (1994) (detailing the new and extensive processes for regulation of pharmaceuticals and new drug approval in the European and Japanese markets, which make such drugs marketable in the United States).

See discussion infra Parts II.A, II.B.


See Neckers, supra note 12, at 308 (noting that the postmarketing surveillance system in Japan “requires pharmaceutical companies to complete early adverse reaction reports, ‘early phase postmarketing vigilance,’ clinical experience investigation, special investigations, and postmarketing clinical studies”); see also Rachel F. Ochs, Pharmaceuticals: The Battle for Control in the 21st Century, 10 J.L. & Health 297, 331–32 (suggesting that the FDA’s stringent regulation of pharmaceutical drugs encourages the Japanese government to improve its clinical testing in order to compete in the American market).

See Neckers, supra note 12, at 301–02 (noting that the author does not propose that postmarketing in Japan and the EU is perfect; however, their systems’ weaknesses are beyond the scope of this note); see also Peter B. Edelman, Japanese Product Standards as Non-Tariff Trade Barriers: When Regulatory Policy Becomes a Trade Issue, 24 Stan. J. Int’l L. 389, 426–29 (1988) (revealing that Japan’s regulation of pharmaceuticals has a protectionist effect, causing its pharmaceutical market to operate with a lack of transparency that foreign firms find cumbersome).

respective problems. Part II summarizes the regulatory systems in the European Union and Japan, highlighting their unique features. Finally, Part III will propose various changes that should be made to strengthen the FDA’s postmarketing surveillance system.

I. POSTMARKETING IN THE U.S.

A. Phase IV

1. Section 130 of the Modernization Act in Effect

The Food and Drug Administration Modernization Act of 1997 requires the FDA to report annually in the Federal Register on the status of postmarketing commitments made by sponsors of drug and biological products.\textsuperscript{20} Section 506B was added to the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, and allowed the FDA to monitor the progress of postmarketing study commitments, which are either voluntarily agreed to, or required.\textsuperscript{21} Under this additional authority, the FDA has promulgated its own rules that provide a framework for the content and format of the annual progress report.\textsuperscript{22} Published on October 30, 2000, 21 C.F.R. § 314.81(b)(2) modifies annual report requirements for new drug applications (NDAs) and abbreviated new drug applications (ANDAs).\textsuperscript{23} Specifically, under section 314.81(b)(2)(vii), applicants of approved drugs must submit annual reports detailing the status of each clinical safety, clinical efficacy,

\textsuperscript{20} 21 U.S.C. § 356b (2008); Report on the Performance of Drug and Biologics Firms in Conducting Postmarketing Commitment Studies, 72 Fed. Reg. 5069 (Feb. 2, 2007) [hereinafter Report] ("According to the regulations, once a postmarketing study commitment has been made, an applicant must report on the progress of the commitment on the anniversary of the product’s approval until the postmarketing study commitment is completed or terminated . . . .").

\textsuperscript{21} 21 U.S.C.S. § 356b(a)(1) (explaining that the report must be submitted in a form prescribed by the Secretary in regulations issued by the Secretary); § 130, 111 Stat. at 2331 (noting that any agreement between the Secretary and drug sponsor prior to Act’s effective date shall be subject to the requirements of the Act).

\textsuperscript{22} See Report, supra note 20, at 5069 (explaining that section 506B of the Act provides the FDA with authority to monitor the progress of postmarketing studies); 21 C.F.R. § 314.81(b)(2)(vii) (2008) (stating that status reports for pediatric studies shall include statements indicating whether postmarketing clinical studies in pediatric populations were required by FDA under § 201.23).

\textsuperscript{23} 21 C.F.R. § 314.81(b)(2) (explaining that applicants shall submit two copies of the report to the FDA division responsible for reviewing the application annually within sixty days of the anniversary date of U.S. approval of the application); see FDA, NEW DRUG APPLICATION (NDA) PROCESS, http://www.fda.gov/cder/regulatory/applications/NDA.htm (last visited Aug. 1, 2008) (defining new drug applications as the vehicle through which drug sponsors formally propose that the FDA approves new pharmaceuticals for sale and marketing in the U.S); see also FDA, Abbreviated New Drug Application (ANDA) Process for Generic Drugs, http://www.fda.gov/cder/regulatory/applications/ANDA.htm (last visited Aug. 1, 2008) (identifying ANDA as documents that provide for review and ultimate approval of generic drug products).
clinical pharmacology, and nonclinical toxicology study that is required by the FDA or that they have committed to conduct.24

Once an applicant commits to conducting a postmarketing study, they are required to report annually on the status of the commitment until the study is completed or terminated.25 The FDA may determine that the study has been completed or that it is either no longer feasible or would no longer provide useful information.26 The progress report must include a description of the postmarketing study commitment, a schedule for completing the study commitment, and a characterization of the current status of the commitment.27 A brief explanation of the study’s progress is also included.28 A commitment schedule should include projected dates for: (1) submission of the study protocol to FDA, (2) a finalized list of patients, (3) completion of the study, and (4) submission of the final study report to FDA.29 The current status of the commitment must be defined as follows:30 “pending” means the study has not been initiated, but does not meet the criterion for delayed;31 “ongoing” indicates the study is proceeding according to or ahead of the original schedule;32 “delayed” signifies that the study is behind the original schedule;33 “terminated” means the study was ended before completion, but a final study report has not been submitted to FDA; and “submitted” indicates that the study has

24 21 C.F.R. § 314.81(b)(2)(vii) (discussing that status reports for pediatric studies must include statements indicating whether postmarketing clinical studies in pediatric populations were required by the FDA under § 201.23); see Report, supra note 20, at 5069 (explaining that postmarketing commitments concerning chemistry, manufacturing, production, controls, and studies conducted on an applicant’s own initiative are not required to be reported under §§ 314.81(b)(2)(vii) and 601.70).

25 See 21 C.F.R. § 314.81(b)(2)(vii) (noting that the FDA will notify a drug sponsor in writing when study commitment requirements are fulfilled or no longer feasible); see also Report, supra note 20, at 5069 (stating that applicants must report on progress of reports on anniversary of product’s approval).

26 21 C.F.R. § 314.81(b)(2)(vii) (noting that status of postmarketing studies must be reported annually until provided further determination by the FDA); See Report, supra note 20, at 5069 (explaining that annual progress reports may be ceased when commitments are no longer required).

27 See Report, supra note 20, at 5069 (listing three factors central to describing the nature of the study commitment); see also FDA, GUIDANCE FOR INDUSTRY: REPORTS ON STATUS OF POSTMARKETING STUDY COMMITMENTS – IMPLEMENTATION OF SECTION 130 OF THE FOOD AND DRUG MODERNIZATION ACT OF 1997 8 (2006) [hereinafter GUIDANCE FOR INDUSTRY], available at http://www.fda.gov/Cber/gdlns/post130.pdf (highlighting that in most cases the FDA and drug sponsors will have concurred on a protocol before filing the first annual postmarketing study commitment status report).

28 See Report, supra note 20, at 5069 (explaining that annual report’s progress must be detailed in a formal schedule).

29 Id. (explaining that four specific dates must be included in the report schedule).

30 Id. (listing five definitions that must be provided in an annual report).

31 Id.

32 Id.

33 Id.
been completed or terminated,\textsuperscript{34} and a final study report has been submitted to FDA.\textsuperscript{35}

The FDA’s Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) is responsible for maintaining the databases of the postmarketing commitment studies reports.\textsuperscript{36} The progress reports contain information on factors such as: the number of applicants with open (uncompleted) postmarketing commitments, the number of open postmarketing commitments, and the number of open postmarketing commitments for which the FDA did not receive an annual report, etc.\textsuperscript{37} As required under 21 C.F.R. § 314.81(b)(2)(vii), these reports are available to the public through publication in the Federal Register and on the FDA website.\textsuperscript{38} The Secretary of Health and Human Services must determine whether a commitment has been satisfactorily completed and, if not completed by the proposed deadlines, why it was not completed.\textsuperscript{39} If a study is found to have been unsatisfactorily completed, a sponsor may be required to notify practitioners of the failure to complete the studies, including any unanswered questions of safety.\textsuperscript{40}

Postmarketing studies can be either required or voluntarily agreed to by sponsors.\textsuperscript{41} Agreements by sponsors to voluntarily undertake a

\textsuperscript{34} Id.
\textsuperscript{35} Id.
\textsuperscript{36} See generally FDA, About the CDER, http://www.fda.gov/cder/about/default.htm (last visited Aug. 1, 2008) (describing the organization and functions of the CDER); FDA, REPORT TO CONGRESS: REPORTS ON POSTMARKETING STUDIES (FDAMA 130) 7 (2002) [hereinafter FDAMA 130], available at http://www.fda.gov/cber/fdama/postmtkfdamal30.pdf (last visited Aug. 1, 2008) (noting the CDER’s procedures for maintaining databases of postmarketing commitments, as well as its development of more efficient systems).
\textsuperscript{37} See Report, supra note 20, at 5069 (listing five details included in every annual report sent to the FDA); FDAMA 130, supra note 36, at 8–9 (explaining the specific details that must be reported to the Federal Register); see generally FDA, U.S. FDA CDER Home Page, http://www.fda.gov/cder/ (providing information on the CDER’s history, accomplishments and other general background).
\textsuperscript{38} See 21 C.F.R. § 314.81(b)(2)(vii) (2008) ("The status of these postmarketing studies shall be reported annually. . . . [T]he FDA may publicly disclose any information described in . . . this section . . ."); see also Report, supra note 20, at 5069 (indicating that disclosed information is also available on the CDER website).
\textsuperscript{39} See 21 U.S.C. § 356(b)(2) (2008) (providing the requirements a fast track product must meet to receive approval); see also Schanz, supra note 7, at 494 (explaining that the Secretary of Health and Human Services is the U.S.’s principle agency in protecting the health of Americans). See generally U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Home Page, http://www.hhs.gov/about/whatwedo.html (last visited Mar. 1, 2008) (defining the Secretary’s obligations to several public health government agencies).
\textsuperscript{40} See 21 U.S.C. § 356b(e) (2008) ("The Secretary may require that a sponsor who, for reasons not satisfactory to the Secretary, fails to complete by its deadline a study under any of such sections of such type for a drug or biological product. . . . notify practitioners who prescribe such drug or biological product of the failure to complete such study. . . ."); see also Schanz, supra note 7, at 494 (explaining the duties a sponsor may owe to practitioners if their study is found unsatisfactory).
\textsuperscript{41} See Schanz, supra note 7, at 494. Study commitments are FDA tools to ensure drug safety. Id. Together, study commitments and the AE system are a critical stage of the drug approval and
postmarketing study occur either at the time of drug approval, or after approval.42 Commitments that are made at the time of drug approval are generally intended to provide additional information about the risks, benefits, and optimal use of the drug.43 Those that are made after drug approval are tailored towards a specific safety concern that has been discovered after approval.44

The FDA may require sponsors to conduct postmarketing study commitments only in specific situations.45 First, when verification of clinical benefits of drugs that were approved under the accelerated approval process is needed, the FDA has the authority to mandate these postmarketing studies.46 Second, if a drug has been approved based only on animal efficacy data, a sponsor must conduct postmarketing studies when ethical and feasible to verify its clinical benefits and safety in humans.47 In monitoring processes. Id. The type of regulatory framework determines the effectiveness and safety of a drug. Id. "[S]uch [postmarketing] studies are generally not required for most drugs and devices" even though postmarketing studies capture "a critical information production point, because many of the most important safety and efficacy problems only become clear after a drug has entered the patient population." See Daniel R. Cahoy, Medical Product Information Incentives and the Transparency Paradox, 82 Ind. L.J. 623, 633 (2007).

42 See Schanz, supra note 7, at 494 ("[S]ome postmarketing studies can be voluntarily undertaken by sponsors. The agreement to do so can arise at the time the drug is approved or after the FDA grants marketing approval." (citing GUIDANCE FOR INDUSTRY, supra note 27, at 3–4 )); see also OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GEN., DEP’T OF HEALTH AND HUM. SERVS., FDA’S MONITORING OF POSTMARKETING STUDY COMMITMENTS 3 (2006) [hereinafter HHS OIG], available at http://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/oei-01-04-00390.pdf (classifying these types of studies as those “requested by FDA and agreed to by drug applicants”).

43 See GUIDANCE FOR INDUSTRY, supra note 27, at 4 (stating that most post-approval studies focus on information that is not available upon initial approval); Barbara A. Noah, Adverse Drug Reactions: Harnessing Experiential Data to Promote Patient Welfare, 49 Cath. U. L. Rev. 449, 457–58 (2000) (highlighting that the pre-approval system provides information about a drug’s efficacy, safety, and side effects).

44 See GUIDANCE FOR INDUSTRY, supra note 27, at 4 (explaining that most post-approval studies identify problematic results associated with previously approved drugs); Noah, supra note 43, at 459–60 (recognizing that post-approval monitoring identifies issues that do not appear during pre-approval studies including: proper dosage, interaction with other drugs, proper use for pediatric and geriatric populations, smoking and alcohol lifestyle habits, and interaction with multiple diseases).

45 See Schanz, supra note 7, at 494 (listing some of the particular circumstances under which drug sponsors may be required to conduct postmarketing studies); HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 1 (stating that the FDA considers postmarketing studies essential in limited circumstances such as accelerated approval applications or mandatory tests for pediatric studies).

46 21 U.S.C.S. § 356b(a)(1) (2008) ("[S]ponsors of a drug that has entered into an agreement . . . to conduct a postmarketing study of a drug shall submit . . . [this report] within 1 year after the approval of such drug . . . ."); see 21 C.F.R. § 314.510 (2008) (specifying that the FDA’s marketing accelerated approval for new drugs may be subject to further drug studies); see also FDA, FDA’s Drug Review Process: Ensuring Drugs are Safe and Effective (2002), http://www.fda.gov/ndac/features/2002/402_drug.html (defining accelerated approval as the process that allows an NDA to be approved before conducting normally required measures of effectiveness).

47 See 21 C.F.R § 314.610(b)(1) (2008) (clarifying that approval based on evidence of effectiveness from studies on animals must be augmented by "[t]he applicant . . . conduct[ing] postmarketing studies, such as field studies, to verify and describe the drug’s clinical benefit and to assess its safety when used as indicated when such studies are feasible and ethical"); see also
addition, certain drugs are approved for adults before pediatric studies can be completed. Therefore, some postmarketing studies are necessary to test the safety and efficacy of the drugs in pediatric populations. Finally, postmarketing commitments may be mandated when determining whether a previous approval should be revoked. Another form of postmarketing studies is controls study commitments (CMCs), which are studies that examine the consistency and reliability of a drug’s strength, purity, and potency. However, these commitments are not subject to the annual reporting requirement under section 314.81(b)(2)(vii).

The most recent report in the Federal Register, issued on February 2, 2007, summarizes the status of postmarketing commitments as of September 30, 2006. Out of a total of 1,259 postmarketing commitments of NDAs and ANDAs, only 144 were completed. 899 studies (71 percent)
were pending, 184 (15 percent) were ongoing, 31 (3 percent) were delayed, and 1 (less than 1 percent) study had been terminated. From these statistics alone, it is evident that these postmarketing study commitments are not being effectively enforced.

2. Problems with Phase IV Postmarketing Commitments

In theory, voluntary commitments by sponsors are an efficient means of collecting postmarketing data. However, these agreements do not result from "fairly standard negotiating," thus contributing to the frighteningly low completion rate. The complex relationship between the FDA and pharmaceutical companies involves political and power struggles, with each side sometimes giving and other times taking. Under the Prescription Drug User Fee Act (PDUFA) of 1992, the FDA was authorized to collect fees from companies that produced certain drug and biological products. The PDUFA required that drug manufacturers pay fees to the FDA for the processing of drug applications. Yet, the PDUFA
also required the FDA to use the fees to hire employees to review applications faster, creating a problematic system of FDA regulators that were financially dependent upon the same firms they were regulating.63

Moreover, some FDA employees that are responsible for approving drugs have ties to the pharmaceutical companies themselves.64 For example, during the highly controversial Vioxx scandal, it was found that ten of the thirty-two FDA advisors whose votes were determinative in allowing Vioxx to return to the market had ties to the drug industry.65 Testimony showed that the FDA ignored warnings of increased risk of heart attacks and failed to change the warning label as a result of pressure from drug manufacturers.66 A more recent case concerns the morning-after contraceptive pill, which was rejected even before the scientific investigation was completed.67 High level FDA management made the premature decision to deny approval of the drug, causing Assistant FDA Commissioner Dr. Susan F. Wood, Director of the Office of Women’s Health, to resign, due to the influence of political appointees.68 In this way,

63 See Thomas, supra note 59, at 372 ("[H]aving the regulators depend financially on the regulated has laid the groundwork for concerns of a system compromised by conflict of interest."); James L. Zelenay, The Prescription Drug User Fee Act: Is a Faster Food and Drug Administration Always a Better Food and Drug Administration?, 60 FOOD DRUG L.J. 261, 262 (suggesting that the FDA’s dependence on fees from the drug industry creates a glaring conflict of interest).

64 Thomas, supra note 59, at 377 (noting the ties to the pharmaceutical industry held by FDA advisors involved in approving Vioxx); see Peter Lurie, Cristina M. Almeida, Nicholas Stine, et al., Financial Conflict of Interest Disclosure and Voting Patterns at Food and Drug Administration Drug Advisory Committee Meetings, 295 JAMA 1921, 1921 (2006) (reporting that a study of 221 drug-related meetings held by sixteen advisory committees revealed that in seventy-three percent of the meetings, at least one member or voting consultant disclosed a conflict).

65 See Thomas, supra note 59, at 377 (stating that “ten of the thirty-two FDA advisors on the Vioxx matter had links to the [drug] industry”); see also Carla Sharetto, FDA ‘Too Cozy with Drug Companies,’ Senator Charges, DAILY NEWS CENT., Mar. 12, 2005, http://health.dailynewscenntal.com/ content/view/501/62 (reporting charges from Senator Charles Grassley that “[t]he existing Office of New Drugs is hampered by real and perceived conflicts of interest”).

66 See Thomas, supra note 59, at 372–73 (detailing the FDA’s refusal to change the warning label on Vioxx packages); Jonathan V. O’Steen & Van O’Steen, The FDA Defense: Vioxx(R) and the Argument Against Federal Preemption of State Claims for Injuries Resulting From Defective Drugs, 48 ARIZ. L. REV. 67, 88 (2006) (“Notwithstanding concerns among FDA officials that Vioxx posed significant heart-related risks, the agency sat idly by while Merck spent more than $100 million annually in direct-to-consumer marketing of Vioxx.”).

67 See, e.g., Thomas, supra note 59, at 377 (commenting that the FDA rejected a morning-after contraceptive pill before finishing its investigation of the drug); see also Julie Rovner, GAO Questions FDA Decision on ‘Morning-After’ Pill, NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO, Nov. 15, 2005, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyld=5013111 (describing the General Accountability Office’s investigation into the FDA’s decision to reject the morning-after contraceptive, Plan B).

68 See Thomas, supra note 59, at 377 (emphasizing the political override of FDA’s advisory panel that had voted twenty-three to four authorizing the sale of the drug); Marc Kaufman, FDA Official Quits Over Delay on Plan B: Women’s Health Chief Says Commissioner’s Decision on Contraceptive was Political, WASH. POST, Sept. 1, 2005, at A8 (“Susan F. Wood, assistant FDA commissioner for women’s health and director of the Office of Women’s Health, said she was leaving her position after five years because Commissioner Lester M. Crawford’s announcement Friday amounted to unwarranted interference in agency decision-making.”).
postmarketing studies may be viewed as a combination of FDA personnel bending from external pressures, and higher-level officials wanting to satisfy political agendas.\textsuperscript{69}

Another piece of the complicated regulator/regulated relationship is that the FDA effectively has complete discretion in deciding whether to approve a drug.\textsuperscript{70} Although sponsors have a statutory right to appeal FDA decisions rejecting NDAs, courts are unwilling to question the FDA's judgment.\textsuperscript{71} Judges are understandably reluctant to approve a drug that FDA experts found to be unsafe.\textsuperscript{72} Furthermore, no effective means exists to prevent the FDA from "sitting" on an application indefinitely.\textsuperscript{73} Despite the requirement that the FDA take action 180 days after the filing of the application, the FDA has never been forced to do so.\textsuperscript{74} The agency may also act on an NDA by issuing approval letters, but not actually approving the NDA.\textsuperscript{75} For sponsors, the longer the delay in the review process, the more financial losses they will inevitably sustain.\textsuperscript{76} Millions of dollars are

\textsuperscript{69} See Steenburg, supra note 2, at 340 (noting that postmarketing studies have become a compromise between external pressures and personal doubts regarding a drug's adequacy); see also Christopher Placitella & Justin Klein, The Civil Justice System Bridges the Great Divide in Consumer Protection, 43 DUQ. L. REV. 219, 220-21 (2005) (stating that the FDA appears to be falling under the influence of the industries they are supposed to be regulating and political pressures of the Administration in power).

\textsuperscript{70} See Steenburg, supra note 2, at 335 (discussing the FDA's unreviewable discretion to deny approval and ability to prolong the drug review process as evidence that the FDA has virtually complete power); see also Linda Katherine Leibfarth, Note, Giving the Terminally Ill Their Due (Process): A Case for Expanded Access to Experimental Drugs Through the Political Process, 61 VAND. L. REV. 1281, 1286-87 (2008) (detailing how the costs, length of time for approval and access to drug testing has effectively given the FDA complete discretion in the drug approval process).

\textsuperscript{71} See 21 U.S.C.S. § 355(h) (2008) (granting drug sponsors the right to appeal FDA judgments on NDAs and explaining the procedural steps of an appeal); see also Steenburg, supra note 2, at 334 (explaining that although sponsors have the right to appeal, "the agency in practice enjoys complete discretion in deciding whether or not to allow manufacturers to bring their drugs on the market").

\textsuperscript{72} See Steenburg, supra note 2, at 335 (stating that judges defer to the FDA experts on questions of drug safety and approval); see also Leibfarth, supra note 70 at 1316 (noting that the Supreme Court, recognizing its limitations in the fields of science and medicine, traditionally defers to FDA decisions).

\textsuperscript{73} Steenburg, supra note 2, at 334-35 ("The 1962 . . . FDCA amendments nominally require that FDA take action within 180 days after the . . . filing of an application, but there is no specific enforcement mechanism."); see Charles J. Walsh & Alissa Pynch, Rationalizing the Regulation of Prescription Drugs and Medical Devices: Perspectives on Private Certification and Tort Reform, 48 RUTGERS L. REV. 883, 908-09 (1996) (commenting that the FDA can, effectively, delay review indefinitely by claiming to be unsatisfied with the amount of detail of information provided by the manufacturer).

\textsuperscript{74} See 21 U.S.C.S. § 355(c)(1) (requiring the FDA to take action within 180 days of the application's filing); see also Steenburg, supra note 2, at 335 (explaining that there is no specific enforcement mechanism for the 180-day requirement).

\textsuperscript{75} See Steenburg, supra note 2, at 335 (stating that approval letters indicate that a drug is effectively approved pending the resolution of certain issues); see also Liora Sukhatme, Note, Deterring Fraud: Mandatory Disclosure and the FDA Drug Approval Process, 82 N.Y.U. L. REV. 1210, 1220 (2007) (explaining that the FDA may issue approval letters conditioned on adherence to labeling details and postmarketing requirements).

\textsuperscript{76} See Steenburg, supra note 2, at 335 ("With each month that passes without marketing approval,
lost each month a drug remains unapproved. Consequently, pharmaceutical companies may “agree” to postmarketing commitments in order to speed up the approval process. The FDA’s power to withhold approval is often characterized as the agency’s “most powerful weapon.”

On the other hand, drug sponsors also have a significant pull over FDA in the area of voluntary commitments. Sponsors can use media publicity to their advantage by heavily promoting the drug before it is actually approved. If a manufacturer of a promising new drug garners enough support and publicity from the media and the community, “an FDA rejection or delay runs the risk of drawing the ire of legislators and patient advocacy groups.” For example, the sponsor of the breast cancer drug Arimidex was able to generate enough support from the breast cancer community that it actually informed the FDA that it would not agree to any commitments unless the drug was approved immediately; the FDA obliged in order to avoid any media backlash. Also, if the sponsor fails to complete the commitments by the purported deadlines, the FDA may...
threaten to withdraw approval of the drug. However, the threat of withdrawal is almost meaningless. Drug sponsors are able to “passively” resist completing their studies once they are in place – especially if the drug is already on the market.

According to the Institute of Medicine, many of these studies occur as afterthoughts, late in the review process. Because these agreements occur at the time of drug approval or after approval, the FDA has limited control in negotiating the details of study protocols to ensure their efficacy. Conversely, manufacturers also do not have time to assess whether the FDA’s demands are even reasonable, and are deprived of the opportunity to weigh the costs and benefits of the proposed commitments. Another consequence of deferring these commitments is that many studies are poorly designed, resulting in unnecessary and impracticable tests.

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84 See 21 U.S.C. § 355(e) (2008) (delineating the FDA Secretary’s ability to withdraw approval of a drug); see also Steenburg, supra note 2, at 337–38 (describing circumstances in which the FDA has threatened to withdraw approval).


86 Steenburg, supra note 2, at 338 (“[S]ponsors can ‘passively’ resist Phase IV demands . . . .”); see Gardiner Harris, Congressional Investigators Are Critical of F.D.A.’s Efforts to Detect Drug Dangers, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 24, 2006, at A12 (discussing the Institute of Medicine’s report which recommends giving the FDA greater authority to force drug makers to complete post-approval clinical trials).

87 See Schanz, supra note 7, at 495–96. In 2007, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) published “The Future of Drug Safety,” a report that examined FDA’s regulatory oversight. Id. Due to recent drug safety problems, many FDA actions have been called into question and IOM was asked by FDA to investigate FDA’s regulatory decision-making and oversight processes. Id. Also, Gardner Harris commented that “[t]he report’s conclusions are often damning. It describes the Food and Drug Administration as rife with internal squabbles and hobbled by underfinancing, poor management and outdated regulations.” Gardner Harris, Study Condemns F.D.A.’s Handling of Drug Safety, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 23, 2006, at A1.

88 Steenburg, supra note 2, at 337 (citing the FDA’s limited ability to demand post approval study requirements); see Harris, supra note 87, at A1 (discussing the Institute of Medicine’s report which criticized the FDA’s regulatory structure and recommended various changes to provide FDA with more regulatory powers in order to better administer the drug approval process).

89 See Steenburg, supra note 2, at 342 (noting that conferring with drug manufacturers at the last minute denies them the opportunity to assess whether phase IV demands are reasonable); see also Harris, supra note 87, at A1 (discussing some of the IOM report’s recommendations for overhauling the FDA’s regulatory system).

90 See Schanz, supra note 7, at 496 (finding that postmarketing studies implemented late in the review process result in many unfulfilled commitments, ultimately hindering the usefulness of the study); see also Report, supra note 20, at 5070 (reporting that twelve percent of total concluded studies
Unnecessary commitment demands made by the FDA waste time and financial resources. Overall, these key factors contribute to the significant number of delayed and incomplete postmarketing studies.

3. The FDA Lacked an Effective System of Monitoring Postmarketing Commitments

In June 2006, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) published a report, FDA's Monitoring of Postmarketing Study Commitments, evaluating the extent to which the FDA monitors its open postmarketing study commitments. After extensive research and interviewing, the OIG concluded that the FDA lacked an effective monitoring system for open commitments. CDER’s Office of New Drugs (OND) employs reviewers who are responsible for checking the accuracy of the annual status reports. A database is used to help track and monitor the status of the commitments. In addition to ensuring accuracy, reviewers must also make a determination of the commitment’s progress, and how close it is to completion. Reviewers must indicate whether or not they agree with the
proposed status of the commitments and the explanations for that status, which are all offered by the sponsor. These reports should be reviewed within ninety days of receipt.

The first major challenge in the monitoring system is the fact that FDA officials could not identify which commitments were actually overdue. Many reviewers had to search through a postmarketing commitment database and some even relied on telephone calls from drug applicants themselves to find overdue commitments. The OIG also found their database to be outdated, failing to account for many open commitments and drugs that had been withdrawn. A second organizational flaw is the confusing numbering system that is used to categorize commitments. Numbers that should only be used to indicate a commitment’s progress levels are often used for other functions. As a result, many mislabeled commitments are entered into the database, creating confusion for later

*the Morning: Modifying Prescription Drug Labels as a Result of Postmarket Surveillance, 62 FOOD & DRUG L.J. 529, 532 (2007) (describing the duty of OND to review various sources of information and make a determination as to what action, if any, is necessary).*

98 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 4 (explaining the requirement of reviewers to indicate whether they concur or disagree on the status of commitments and proposed explanations of such status); see also Jacobson & Feigal, supra note 97, at 532 ("[OND] is responsible for... postmarket monitoring of drug safety, and is the primary decisionmaking authority when it comes to postmarket actions that may be taken with respect to a drug.").

99 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 4 (describing the FDA’s planned review period); see also GUIDANCE FOR INDUSTRY, supra note 27, at 14 (providing guidance for applicants to properly submit postmarketing study commitment status reports for approved drugs).

100 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 14–15 (noting that reviewers at eight of the fourteen review divisions classified their inability to identify open commitments as a major or moderate challenge in their "ability to effectively monitor the progress" of the commitments); see also FDA, INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF FDA'S PRESCRIPTION DRUG USER FEE ACT III – EVALUATIONS & INITIATIVES: POSTMARKETING COMMITMENTS STUDY FINAL REPORT 23 (Jan. 2008) [hereinafter INDEPENDENT EVALUATION], available at http://www.fda.gov/ope/PMC/pmcstudy08.pdf (commenting on the difficulty in determining which commitments are overdue).

101 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 14–15 (detailing the steps taken by reviewers to attain the information sought); INDEPENDENT EVALUATION, supra note 100, at 23–24 (describing the responsibilities of the reviewers in acquiring the status of postmarketing commitments).

102 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 11, 15 (noting that reviewers could not identify a commitment’s completion progress and approximately one-third of their annual status reports (ASRs) were either missing or incomplete); see also INDEPENDENT EVALUATION, supra note 100, at 23 (presenting evidence of the inefficiency and outdated status of the postmarketing commitment database).

103 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 15 (noting that the FDA database’s numbering system for categorizing commitments is confusing); see also FDA, Postmarketing Study Commitments, http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/PMC/index.cfm?StartRow=54&StepSize=1&Paging=Yes (last visited Aug. 7, 2008) (showing evidence, via actual database examples, of the confusing numbering system in the FDA postmarketing database).

A third problem is that the FDA database for postmarketing commitments is outdated and lacks useful information. The database rarely includes any information on start dates, projected completion dates, and already completed projects. Without this pertinent data, it is almost impossible to track the status of the commitments, and to determine whether drug applicants are completing their studies on time.

More importantly, the OIG found that the surveillance of these commitments was not a high priority for FDA officials. When FDA officials prioritize their workloads, they often do not have the resources and time to fully and effectively monitor postmarketing study commitments. As a result of time pressures, reviewers even agreed with drug applicants on terms that were missing from the ASR, thus compromising the accuracy of the reports. In fiscal year 2004, the FDA only validated thirty percent of the ASRs that were actually submitted. Of the ASRs that were validated for accuracy, many of them were not completed within the ninety day period, thus delaying the entire process for FDA and drug reviewers.
applicants.113

Another important finding was that completed ASRs lacked useful information.114 Drug applicants frequently failed to provide information that was required or recommended by regulation.115 Much of the information that was reported in the ASRs was of limited utility, providing no assurance of the commitment’s progress or whether it was en route to completion.116 ASRs are a principal source of drug safety information for the FDA and an important tool for monitoring postmarketing study commitments.117 If a substantial portion of an ASR is missing, and the information that is present is inadequate, ASRs are essentially useless.118 Many reviewers even characterized the monitoring system as “very shallow” because without useful data, drug applicants cannot be encouraged to complete their studies.119 The FDA must take steps to ensure that these commitments are being fulfilled in order for these ASRs to be beneficial.120

113 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 17 (finding that the FDA often fell short of meeting its own requirements for monitoring postmarketing study commitments); see also Basquill, supra note 1, at 84 (asserting that an increase of data that the FDA must review would require greater FDA resources than those already available).

114 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 12 (noting that even complete ASRs often lacked information that would be useful in monitoring the progress of postmarketing study commitments); see also Neckers, supra note 12, at 301 (discussing the poor quality of submitted reports to the FDA).

115 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 13 (stating that many ASRs were missing important dates); see also Neckers, supra note 12, at 302 (stating that the FDA often receives reports with inadequate information or detail).

116 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 12-13 (stating that inadequate ASRs do not assist in ensuring progress of postmarketing study commitments); see also Basquill, supra note 1, at 84–85 (stating that the FDA is “woefully understaffed and under-funded”).

117 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 11 (“ASRs are intended to be a key source of information for FDA and an important tool for monitoring postmarketing study commitments.”); see also Curt D. Furbag et al., The FDA and Drug Safety: A Proposal for Sweeping Changes, 166 Archives Internal Med. 1938, 1939 (2006), available at http://www.ahrp.org/cms/content/view/358/28 (noting that the FDA receives about 400,000 reports a year of serious or unexpected drug safety issues as part of its Adverse Event Reporting System).

118 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 14 (explaining that ASRs do not give complete information and as a result, reviewers are forced to search for past reports that were submitted by the sponsor); see also Schanz, supra note 7, at 496–97 (asserting that about one-third of ASRs are not submitted or are incomplete, and that many of the completed ones lack useful information).

119 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 13 (noting the claims made by an FDA official that the current process for monitoring commitments is “‘very shallow’” because it does not necessarily move the commitments towards completion); see also Schanz, supra note 7, at 495 (“Legally, the maze of regulations governing postmarket obligations by pharmaceutical sponsors leaves considerable opportunity for ambiguity, delays and lack of stringent enforcement measures to motivate compliance.”).

120 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 17 (indicating that monitoring postmarketing study comments and ASRs is not a top priority at the FDA); see also Steenburg, supra note 2, at 361 (expanding on the notion that because postmarketing demands are no longer a rare exception, completion rates of commitments are expected to decrease).
B. Serious Adverse Events Reporting

1. History

The Office of Surveillance and Epidemiology (OSE) identifies adverse events through two important systems: postmarketing surveillance and risk assessment. Because premarket clinical trials are generally conducted on populations of a few hundred to a few thousand participants, only a fraction of a drug’s practical, long-term effects are discovered. As a result, the FDA approves drugs by judging whether the drug’s known risks are outweighed by its known benefits. The purpose of the FDA’s postmarketing surveillance system is to collect data on any rare or long term effects of the drug that are not found during pre-approval. Under 21 C.F.R. § 314.80, all approved NDAs are required to report to the FDA when an adverse drug reaction occurs. An adverse drug experience

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121 See FDA, Center for Drug Evaluation & Research, Office of Surveillance and Epidemiology, http://www.fda.gov/Cder/Offices/ODS/default.htm (last visited Sept. 1, 2008). CDER evaluates drug safety by maintaining a system of postmarketing surveillance and risk assessment programs that identify adverse events that were absent in the drug development process. Id. OSE was formerly known as the Office of Drug Safety. Id. The CDER website gives a comprehensive view of the CDER’s function and how it achieves its goals. See U.S. FDA CDER Home Page, supra note 36. While risk assessment is an integral aspect of postmarketing surveillance, it is outside the scope of this note.

122 See Syed Rizwanuddin Ahmad, Adverse Drug Event Monitoring at the Food and Drug Administration: Your Report Can Make a Difference, 18(1) J. GEN. INTERNAL MED. 57, 57 (2003), available at http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1494803 (noting further that most trials exclude the elderly, pregnant women, patients with multiple diseases, and those on medications suspected of interacting with the study drug); see also Basquill, supra note 2, at 297 ("Preapproval trials involve no more than a few thousand volunteers - often carefully culled and largely homogenous - who are treated under carefully controlled conditions by highly-trained medical specialists.").

123 See Ahmad, supra note 122, at 57 (explaining that because the participants in clinical trials are not always representative of the real world where the drug will be used, the safety reporting is not always perfect); see also Basquill, supra note 1, at 76 (suggesting that adverse events that are too rare to be noticed during the clinical trials may manifest themselves faster when a population hundreds of times larger is exposed to the drug); Steenburg, supra note 2, at 297 (revealing that the FDA commissioner admitted that even the most extensive clinical tests will only reveal a fraction of the information that emerges during the course of a drug’s use).

124 See GAO, supra note 85, at 7 (explaining that if the FDA has reason to believe that a drug on the market poses a threat, it will weigh the effect of that adverse event against the benefit of the drug to determine what actions to take); see also Basquill, supra note 1, at 74-75 (indicating that a prescription drug will only be sold after it undergoes a "complex review and approval process" to determine whether it meets agency standards of safety and efficacy).

125 CENTER FOR DRUG EVALUATION AND RESEARCH, FDA, ENFORCEMENT OF THE POSTMARKETING ADVERSE DRUG EXPERIENCE REPORTING REGULATIONS (1999), available at http://www.fda.gov/cder/aers/chapter53.htm (stating that all sponsors, manufacturers, packers and distributors are required to report serious and unexpected adverse drug experiences to the FDA); see Ahmad, supra note 122, at 57 (noting that the FDA monitors the safety of each drug after it reaches the market through the Adverse Event Reporting System, which receives information from the pharmaceutical companies, as well as from physicians, nurses, dentists and consumers).

126 21 C.F.R. § 314.80(c) (2008) ("The applicant shall report to FDA adverse drug experience
(ADE) is any undesirable experience resulting from the use of a drug. A serious adverse drug experience (SADE) is any adverse event that is life-threatening, or that results in hospitalization, a significant disability or incapacity, a congenital anomaly, or death. Drug applicants must review any and all ADE information that they obtain or receive from any source. Upon receipt of any adverse drug experience information, applicants have fifteen days to submit an alert report for each event to the FDA. A prompt investigation of each adverse drug experience must also be conducted within fifteen calendar days of receipt of new information or as requested by the FDA.

OSE is responsible for reviewing these reports of adverse reactions through a spontaneous reporting database called Adverse Event Reporting System (AERS). AERS is a computerized information database designed to support the FDA’s postmarketing safety surveillance program. AERS receives information from two primary sources: mandatory reports from sponsors on adverse events that have been spontaneously communicated to them, and adverse event reports from physicians, and other health officials that have voluntarily been submitted to the FDA’s MedWatch program.
Other reports come from sponsors’ clinical studies. Clinical reviewers evaluate the AERS reports and search for safety “signals,” which are previously unrecognized or unlabeled serious adverse events. Once a signal is found, the next step is to look for additional cases in AERS, medical literature or other databases such as those from foreign regulatory agencies. After other cases are found, OSE physicians, who frontline the surveillance program, search for any risk factors, common trends, or causal relationships of the drug. The physicians may then confirm potential signals by conducting studies in one of several large population-based databases that link prescriptions with adverse outcomes. These studies are primarily conducted by specialized investigators who are affiliated with departments of pharmacoepidemiology and pharmacy, in places such as universities and Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs).

After confirmation of a signal, the FDA must decide whether to take

(describing the AERS in general); FDA, MedWatch, http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/What.htm (last visited Oct. 1, 2008) (noting that MedWatch is the FDA Safety Information and Adverse Event Reporting Program and how it provides information about safety issues involving medical products as well as pharmaceutical drugs); FDA, Voluntary Reporting by Health Professionals, http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/report/hcp.htm (last visited Oct. 1, 2008) (explaining how Form FDA 3500 is for voluntary reporting and Form FDA 3500A is for mandatory reporting).

See GAO, supra note 85, at 5–7. Observational studies are also submitted to the FDA for review of adverse events. Id. at 6–7. Observational studies are different from clinical studies in that the investigator has no control over the therapy but merely observes. Id. at 7 n.11. Whereas in clinical studies, the investigator purposely manipulates the therapy to discover any causal relationships. Id. at 7.

FDA, GUIDANCE FOR INDUSTRY: GOOD PHARMACOVIGILANCE PRACTICES AND PHARMACOEPIDEMIOLOGIC ASSESSMENT 4 (2005), available at http://www.fda.gov/CDER/GUIDANCE/635900CC.pdf, notes that clinical studies triggering signals of an adverse event may be submitted to the sponsor or directly to the FDA.

See Ahmad, supra note 122, at 58 (noting that postmarketing safety evaluators are the first to scrutinize data submitted to AERS); see also GOOD PHARMACOVIGILANCE PRACTICES, supra note 135, at 4 (stating that the quality of the reports is necessary for appropriate and effective evaluation).

See Ahmad, supra note 122, at 58. Some common signs are: temporal association, coherence with existing information or biological plausibility, similar effect in drugs of the same class, dose-response relationship, consistency of the association, and specificity of association. Id. Temporal association is when the adverse outcome happens before the target drug was taken, and consistency of the association means the replicability of results. Id. GOOD PHARMACOVIGILANCE PRACTICES, supra note 135, at 6, states that in addition to AERS, additional cases may be identified through the Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS).

See GAO, supra note 85, at 16 (explaining that the safety evaluators must determine whether the adverse events are drug related); see also Ahmad, supra note 123, at 57–58 (emphasizing the importance of physicians’ and other health care officials’ roles in FDA’s postmarketing surveillance system).

See Ahmad, supra note 122, at 58 (noting that the FDA uses extramural investigators to confirm signals); see also GOOD PHARMACOVIGILANCE PRACTICES, supra note 135, at 14 (discussing the use of “thorough database search strategies based on updated coding terminology”).

See Ahmad, supra note 122, at 58 (noting that investigators have access to a variety of databases); see also SUSAN THAUL, CRS REPORT FOR CONGRESS, DRUG SAFETY AND EFFECTIVENESS: ISSUES AND ACTION OPTIONS AFTER FDA APPROVAL 15–16 (2005) (arguing that HMOs or universities might be better situated to perform postmarket reviews than the government).
regulatory action, and if so, what kind of action to take. This is done by considering the results of the safety analysis in the context of other factors, such as the availability of other similar drugs and the condition the drug is designed to treat. There are a variety of regulatory actions taken by the FDA if the adverse event is severe enough. For example, the FDA can require sponsors to send warning letters to prescribers of the drug, identifying the specific hazard, and adding to or strengthening warning information in the drug’s labeling. The FDA may also issue public health advisories concerning the specific use of a drug, and may even restrict the distribution of the drug. Furthermore, in rare instances, a drug may be withdrawn from the market either voluntarily by the sponsor, or by the FDA’s action. However, drugs have been voluntarily removed in almost all withdrawal cases. While the FDA has limited authority to

141 See Ahmad, supra note 122, at 58 (listing factors that may help the FDA decide whether regulatory action is necessary); see also THAUL, supra note 140, at 9 (discussing the types of regulatory actions that the FDA might take in response to an adverse event, like letters to health professionals).

142 See GAO, supra note 85, at 17 (explaining that the Office of New Drugs staff within the review divisions determine what, if any, regulatory action should be taken); see also THAUL, supra note 140, at 2 (discussing the Congressional hearings regarding COX-2 inhibitors: “[a]fter weighing the evidence on the safety and risk-to-benefit of Vioxx and similar drugs”).

143 See Ahmad, supra note 122, at 58 (noting that factors such as the seriousness of the adverse events, the availability and safety of alternative therapy, and the outcome of past regulatory intervention, are all important considerations in the determining regulatory action); see also THAUL, supra note 140, at 9 (suggesting that withdrawal from the market is the most extreme and rarely used action).

144 Ahmad, supra note 122, 58–59. Examples of recent FDA regulatory actions include: the demand of additional postmarketing reports associated with Clozaril, the addition of a black box warning in the labeling of Serzone, and the strengthening of the warnings, precautions, and adverse reactions section of labeling for Actos and Avandia. Id. Table 1, “Recent Safety-based Drug Withdrawals” provides a list of recent drug withdrawals and their respective adverse events. Id. at 59.

145 See Ahmad, supra note 122, at 59 (referring to two antifungal treatments, Sporanox and Lamisil, its association for serious hepatic events, and possible association of serious cardiac adverse events); see also Jacobson & Feigal, supra note 97, at 539 (showing that among the FDA’s communication tools are public health advisories to inform the public).

146 See 21 U.S.C. § 355(e) (2008) (allowing the FDA to propose withdrawal when it determines that a drug is unsafe under conditions of use approved in its application); see also Ahmad, supra note 122, at 59 (noting that the drug cerivastatin “was voluntarily withdrawn from the market by the drug’s manufacturer following serious reports of rhabdomyolysis in association with its use”); see also GAO, supra note 85, at 10 (“FDA does not have explicit authority to require that drug sponsors take other safety actions; however, when FDA identifies a potential problem, sponsors generally negotiate with FDA to develop a mutually agreeable remedy to avoid other regulatory action.”).

147 See GAO, supra note 85, at 10 (“Since 2000 there have been 10 drug withdrawals for safety reasons, and in all of these cases the drug’s sponsors voluntarily removed the drug from the market.”); see also Richard A. Epstein, Regulatory Paternalism in the Market for Drugs: Lessons From Vioxx and Celebrex, 5 YALE J. HEALTH POL’Y, L. & ETHICS 741, 742 (2005) (stating that voluntarily withdrawing a drug from the market leaves open the possibility that the drug can be returned to the market more readily as well as playing a better role before the jury in subsequent litigation).
require that sponsors conduct postmarket safety studies, sponsors will usually agree to revise drug labels or restrict distribution, to prevent removal of the drug.\textsuperscript{148}

2. Problems with Postmarketing Surveillance System

The collection of ADE is practically the only statutorily-established tool for postmarket surveillance.\textsuperscript{149} Although the spontaneous reporting system has been somewhat effective in identifying latent drug-related problems, there is plenty of room for improvement.\textsuperscript{150} The majority of problems with the surveillance program can be classified as problems of under-reporting and inadequacy of the information itself.\textsuperscript{151} Three barriers to reporting of adverse events are: recognizing of ADE, reporting within the institution, and reporting to the FDA.\textsuperscript{152} Recognition of a potential relationship between a drug and an adverse event may be difficult due to the common occurrence of certain medical conditions.\textsuperscript{153} If a drug only amplifies the frequency of that medical condition, it will be difficult to distinguish that condition from a true adverse event.\textsuperscript{154} Moreover, there is often a time

\textsuperscript{148} See GAO, supra note 85, at 43 (citing the voluntary withdrawal of Baycol by sponsors after communications concerning the risk of breakdown of muscle fibers); see also Epstein, supra note 147, at 741–42, 744 (noting the withdrawal of Vioxx and Rezulin from the market voluntarily after findings concerning the drugs' possibility as a "killer drug").

\textsuperscript{149} See Bright, supra note 11, at 609 (emphasizing the difference between the number of FDA-created postmarket tools and the number of law-created tools); see also Schanz, supra note 7, at 493 (revealing that The Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FDCA) contains a provision permitting the FDA to monitor the progress of drugs postmarket).

\textsuperscript{150} See Steenburg, supra note 2, at 298 ("Manufacturers are required to pass along reports that they receive from doctors and others in the field, but they have no baseline obligation to develop their own data-gathering efforts or otherwise to track clinical experiences in an organized manner"); see also Barbara J. Evans & David A. Flockhart, The Unfinished Business of U.S. Drug Safety Regulation, 61 Food & Drug L.J. 45, 53 (2006) (highlighting the fact that only one to ten percent of all adverse events that occurred were reported to FDA, as well as only one third to one half of all serious adverse events).

\textsuperscript{151} See Bright, supra note 11, at 609 (stating that the primary basis of ADE surveillance is the least expensive method of monitoring in the world).

\textsuperscript{152} Bright, supra note 11, at 609 ("There are many barriers to reporting ADE to FDA, which can be divided by reporting step: recognition, reporting within the institution, and reporting to FDA"); see Goldman, supra note 16, at 514 (stating that other barriers include the complexities of risk communication and risk management in the postmarketing realm).

\textsuperscript{153} See Bright, supra note 11, at 609 (addressing the possible reasons for the lack of recognition of a relationship between a drug and ADE); Steenburg, supra note 2, at 299 (arguing that the amplified frequency of medical conditions that commonly occur may be mistaken for a safety "signal").

\textsuperscript{154} See GAO, supra note 85, at 24 (stating that the magnitude of drug safety problems is difficult to establish because the FDA cannot determine the proper frequency of ADEs using AERS data); see also Bright, supra note 11, at 609 (noting that an ADE may go unrecognized if it can be "reasonably explained by other causes").
delay from when a drug is used to the occurrence of the ADE that interferes with establishing causal relationships. The ADE may even occur in a different location of the body from the actual location that was targeted in testing, which further complicates the identification of causal relationships and overall recognition of ADEs.

If a potential causal relationship is identified, there are additional obstacles in the reporting phases that reduce the surveillance system's effectiveness. For instance, many ADEs fail to be reported because they are thought to be already known or resolved. Also, those who discover ADEs may be concerned about being blamed for the ADE, and may hesitate to report it. As a result, only a small fraction of the adverse events that occur are actually reported to the FDA. Data reported to the FDA covers only one to ten percent of all adverse events that actually occur, and between one third and one half of all the serious adverse events. Thus, the FDA's MedWatch program, although useful, is undermined by the fact that only a small percentage of reports come from healthcare providers and patients.

155 Bright, supra note 11, at 609 (suggesting that a lack of recognition can be explained by the time delay between drug use and ADE); see LEWIS R. GOLDFRANK ET AL., GOLDFRANK'S TOXICOLOGIC EMERGENCIES 1759 (7th ed. 2002) (providing an example of a "type B" ADE that develops over a period of several days to weeks).

156 Bright, supra note 11, at 609. It is possible for an ADE to occur in a different organ system than that being treated by the drug. Cf. Charles L. Bennett & Cara C. Tigue, Overcoming Barriers to Reporting Adverse Drug Events, MEDSCAPE PHARMACISTS, May 29, 2008, http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/574523. Often, toxicity profiles of new agents in drugs are not fully characterized at the time of FDA approval. Id. Thus, if clinicians are unfamiliar with certain agents and their effect on certain parts of the body, these parts may go untested and the ADE will not be recognized. Id.

157 Bright, supra note 11, at 609–10 (stating that even if a relationship between a drug and ADE is recognized, there are still many barriers to reporting ADE); see Ahmad, supra note 122, at 58 (discussing the limitations of spontaneous reporting, including poor and infrequent documentation).

158 See Bright, supra note 11, at 610. If an ADE is already known, it is publicized or already listed on the label. Id. Martin S. Manno, Preventing Adverse Drug Events, 36 NURSING 2006 3 56, 58 (2006) available at http://www.nursingcenter.com/library/JournalArticle.asp?Article_ID=633458, notes that health care professionals may underreport ADEs if the anticipated benefits of a drug outweigh the risk of developing an anticipated adverse reaction.

159 Bright, supra note 11, at 610. "[T]he healthcare provider . . . could be concerned about being blamed for the ADE . . . ." Id. Another unfortunate reason for under-reporting is as simple as the reporter being too busy. Id. Manno, supra note 158, at 59, comments that sadly, a person who administers a drug causing ADE is more likely to be blamed than the flawed ADE reporting system.

160 See Ahmad, supra note 122, at 58 (explaining that the extent of under-reporting depends on the severity of the ADE, among several other factors); see also Evans & Flockhart, supra note 150, at 53 (criticizing the FDA’s failure to use certain periodical reports of adverse events in a "systematic goal-setting process to reduce their frequency").

161 Evans & Flockhart, supra note 150, at 53 ("[I]t is estimated that data reported to FDA cover only one to ten percent of all adverse events that actually occur, and between one third and one half of all the serious adverse events."); see Basquill, supra note 1, at 79 (indicating that the actual rate of ADE reporting may even be lower than ten percent).

162 Bright, supra note 11, at 610. Manufacturers mostly report to MedWatch and these reports are based on reports from their sales staff or product complaints they received from their customers. Id.
Assuming ADEs have been reported, the information itself is frequently poorly documented, forcing the reviewer to contact the reporter.\textsuperscript{163} Contacting the reporter may even require going through the manufacturer first, which significantly delays the overall process.\textsuperscript{164} More specifically, problems such as inadequate and incomplete drug descriptions and little or no data on the extent of drug use are all too common.\textsuperscript{165} Due to the structure of ADE reports, they often emphasize adverse outcomes and completely neglect successful uses of the drug.\textsuperscript{166} Full extent of drug use, including successful use, is imperative for the accuracy of calculations.\textsuperscript{167} Similarly, limited information compromises risk calculations, due to the lack of detail in underlying problems of the drug.\textsuperscript{168} Altogether, these problems create difficulties in analyzing adverse events and impede the overall surveillance system.\textsuperscript{169}

Goldman, \textit{supra} note 16, at 522, notes that patients or healthcare providers completed only eighteen percent of reports filed between 1993–1998.

\textsuperscript{163} Ahmad, \textit{supra} note 122, at 58 ("One of the limitations of spontaneous reports is that, in general, they are poorly documented, and the safety evaluator may need to contact the event reporter . . . ."); see Cameron Rhudy, \textit{How Congress May Have Failed Consumers with the Food and Drug Administration Amendments Act of 2007}, 27 BIOTECHNOLOGY L. REP. 99, 102 (2008) (citing poor documentation as an "obvious criticism" of MedWatch).

\textsuperscript{164} See Ahmad, \textit{supra} note 122, at 58 (suggesting that adequate documentation at the initial stage stands to expedite the entire process); see also Rhudy, \textit{supra} note 163, at 102 (recognizing that corporations are often disinclined to release information that is detrimental to them).

\textsuperscript{165} Bright, \textit{supra} note 11, at 610 (calculating the true frequency is difficult, which in turn, makes it difficult to establish the magnitude of a safety problem); see GAO, \textit{supra} note 85, at 24–28 (noting that there are many difficulties in obtaining complete and reliable data experienced by regulatory authorities).

\textsuperscript{166} Bright, \textit{supra} note 11, at 610 ("The nature of ADE reports emphasizes cases of adverse outcome and ignores instances of successful use."); see FDA, MedWatch Reporting Forms, http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/getforms.htm (last visited Nov. 8, 2008) (providing only the forms that enable reports of incidents of adverse effects).

\textsuperscript{167} Bright, \textit{supra} note 11, at 610 ("Since there is no inherent mechanism for reporting the total amount of both successful and unsuccessful drug use, risks related to drug use are not readily calculated."); see Struve, \textit{supra} note 94, at 603–04 (suggesting that the amount, quality, and subject matter of reports filed factors into their overall usefulness).

\textsuperscript{168} Bright, \textit{supra} note 11, at 610 ("Many significant problems are discovered and addressed by the manufacturers well before FDA recognizes the problem or takes action. Conversely, manufacturers may not sufficiently address problems with their products until FDA also becomes aware of them."); see Rhudy, \textit{supra} note 163, at 102 (noting the voluntary nature of the reports on which MedWatch relies may result in underreporting).

\textsuperscript{169} See Bright, \textit{supra} note 11, at 610 (noting that no one problem is entirely to blame for difficulties in such analysis); see also Steenburg, \textit{supra} note 2, at 298 (commenting on the "difficulty evaluating the data without a clear sense of the relevant 'denominator' – the number of people meeting a given profile of interest, often based on demographic and medical factors").
II. EUROPE AND JAPAN

A. Europe

The European Union’s market for pharmaceutical products is highly regulated.170 Contrary to the U.S., close to eighty percent of pharmaceutical regulatory activity in the EU is devoted to postmarket monitoring and safety.171 Such close attention to postmarketing activity gives rise to two of the largest differences between pharmaceutical regulation in the U.S. and the EU – the EU’s system of personal and criminal liability172 and their extensive inspections program.173 The pharmacovigilance program varies under the EU’s two decentralized and centralized systems.174 In the decentralized process, the EMEA is responsible for coordinating pharmacovigilance activities, and ensuring that pharmacovigilance is the “collective responsibility of the member states.”175 The EMEA maintains

170 See Matthews & Wilson, supra note 16, at 407 (discussing examples from the European Union of “widespread monitoring” while on the market “in addition to assessment and pre-market authorization of new pharmaceutical products”); see also Teresa Pechulis Buono, Note, Biotechnology-Derived Pharmaceuticals: Harmonizing Regional Regulations, 18 SUFFOLK TRANSNAT’L L. REV. 133, 158 (1995) (examining the EU’s recognition of environmental considerations in the approval process).

171 See Matthews & Wilson, supra note 16, at 419 (positing that pharmacovigilance, the EU’s system for postmarketing regulation, is “a time-consuming process comprising 80 percent of pharmaceutical regulatory activity”); see also Goldman, supra note 16, at 527 (discussing the EU regulatory documents which provide detailed guidance for postmarket surveillance).

172 See Goldman, supra note 16, at 524 (noting that the pharmacovigilance system in Europe “is under strict legal obligations entailing personal financial and criminal liability”); see also Matthews & Wilson, supra note 16, at 416 (indicating that liability is borne by institutions themselves and not simply the countries that recommended market authorization for the product).


174 See Matthews & Wilson, supra note 16 at 408–20. Pharmaceutical regulation in the EU has developed into a centralized and decentralized market. Id. at 420. First, the 1965 Directive 65/65/EEC created a centralized framework for pharmaceutical approval. Id. at 408. The Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products (now known as the CHMP), was also developed to function as a “central clearinghouse for drug approvals submitted to any single European State.” Thomas, supra note 59, at 374 (quoting David V. Eakin, The International Conference on Harmonization of Pharmaceutical Regulations: Progress or Sagnation?, 6 TULSA J. COMP. & INT’L L. 221, 224 (1999)). Under the multi-state procedure for authorization, if a manufacturer was approved by at least one state, it could apply for approval in up to five other states in the EU. Id. at 374–75. However, discretion of approval was left to each state’s regulatory agencies. Id. at 374. In 1993, problems with the multi-state procedure led to the development of the European Medicines Evaluation Agency (EMEA), which “provided[d] a centralized system for approving pharmaceuticals.” Id. at 374. Although EMEA approves pharmaceutical sales in any EU nation, the option of single-state approval still exists, and is now referred to as decentralized mutual recognition. Matthews & Wilson, supra note 16, at 412. A third method of approval is “a country-by-country basis via national registration procedures,” which primarily applies to new drug applicants. Id.

175 Matthews & Wilson, supra note 16, at 420.
clinical results, as well as a database of reports of serious reactions to drugs that were approved through mutual recognition.\textsuperscript{166} Pharmacovigilance in the centralized procedure is executed by the CHMP, which monitors any variations or modifications to an existing market authorization.\textsuperscript{177} The CHMP analyzes evidence and formulates opinions on emerging safety concerns.\textsuperscript{178} Postmarket monitoring is conducted through the EU’s network of national medicines agencies, in close cooperation with healthcare professionals and the pharmaceutical companies themselves.\textsuperscript{179} Volume 9A of the Rules Governing Medicinal Products in the European Union: Guidelines on Pharmacovigilance for Medicinal Products for Human Use, is a complete set of guidelines, requirements, procedures and roles for both Marketing Authorization Holders (drug manufacturers/sponsors) and Competent Authorities (regulatory bodies of each EU state).\textsuperscript{180} The majority of pharmacovigilance legislation is contained in Chapter 3 of Regulation (EC) No 726/2004 and Title IX of Directive 2001/83/EC.\textsuperscript{181}

Under this authority, each MAH must ensure that it has an appropriate system of pharmacovigilance and risk management in place in order to

\textsuperscript{166} Thomas, supra note 59, at 375 (“The EMEA maintains clinical outcomes evidence of pharmaceuticals approved through the centralized system. It also compiles and maintains of reports from national regulatory bodies of 'serious' reactions to pharmaceuticals approved through mutual recognition.”); see Markus Schott, Medical Research on Humans: Regulation in Switzerland, the European Union, and the United States, 60 FOOD & DRUG L.J. 45, 63 (2005) (stating that every EU country must enter a European-wide database, which is only open to the countries’ “competent authorities, the Commission, and the [EMEA], which operates it”).

\textsuperscript{177} Matthews & Wilson, supra note 16, at 420 (“Under the centralized procedure, pharmacovigilance work is carried out by the CPMP ...”); see EMEA, Overview of the Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP), http://www.emea.europa.eu/htms/general/contacts/CHMP/CHMP.html (enumerating the various responsibilities of the CHMP, which include “several post-authorization and maintenance activities”).

\textsuperscript{178} See Volume 9A, supra note 173, at 16. “The Agency’s scientific committee, the CHMP ... is responsible for evaluating evidence and formulating Opinions on emerging safety concerns with centrally authorized products ... .” Id. If a drug is deemed hazardous, EMEA’s “rapid alert” system notifies other national authorities, and a formal CHMP Opinion is published. Matthews & Wilson, supra note 16, at 420. The Opinion is a determination on whether the drug should be withdrawn from the market. Id. Because the publication may take up to six months, the product may be suspended from the market until a final determination is issued. Id.

\textsuperscript{179} See EMEA, supra note 177 (noting that for every centrally authorized product on the market, a European Public Assessment Report (EPAR) is published, providing scientific data as to the reasons for granting authorization, as well as a summary of product characteristics); see also Richard F. Kingham et al., The New European Medicines Agency, 49 FOOD & DRUG L.J. 301, 313–14 (1994) (describing the reporting process, which involves the agencies, healthcare professionals, and the pharmaceutical companies).

\textsuperscript{180} See Volume 9A, supra note 173, at 13 (describing the purpose of the guidelines in EC Volume 9A); see also Goldman, supra note 16, at 527 (noting the guidance that Volume 9A provides).

assure responsibility and liability for its products on the market and to ensure that appropriate action can be taken.\textsuperscript{182} Article 8(3)(n) of Directive 2001/83/EC mandates that MAHs appoint a Qualified Person Responsible for Pharmacovigilance (QPPV).\textsuperscript{183} This is one of the most effective features of pharmacovigilance, and ensures compliance from manufacturers and promotes drug safety. A QPPV is responsible for maintaining the database of information about all suspected adverse reactions that are easily accessible to the EU.\textsuperscript{184} A QPPV must prepare Adverse Reaction reports and Periodic Safety Update Reports (PSUR), monitor the safety of a product throughout its lifetime, and respond to requests for information from other agencies.\textsuperscript{185} A QPPV is financially and criminally liable for failure to fulfill these postmarketing obligations.\textsuperscript{186} Highly detailed descriptions of the pharmacovigilance system, organizational charts, documented procedures, and comprehensive databases are among the many requirements a QPPV must fulfill, and are set out in Volume 9A.\textsuperscript{187}

The pharmacovigilance program also has a specialized Inspections provision. Inspections of a MAH's pharmacovigilance systems are either routine or 'for cause' and are conducted by the Competent Authority of the state in whose territory the QPPV is located.\textsuperscript{188} National inspection

\textsuperscript{182} See Volume 9A, supra note 173, at 15 (describing the responsibilities of MAH); see also Ivana Hanzl-Dujmović et al., Issues with Regulatory Pharmacovigilance in East European Countries: The Industry Perspective, 2007 TOXICOLOGY LETTERS 168, 228–29 (outlining the new requirements for pharmacovigilance in the European Union).

\textsuperscript{183} Volume 9A, supra note 173, at 18. "QPPV should be appropriately qualified, with documented experience in all aspects of pharmacovigilance in order to fulfill the responsibilities and tasks of the post. If the QPPV is not medically qualified, access to a medically qualified person should be available." \textit{Id}. A QPPV should "have experience in all aspects of pharmacovigilance and if not medically qualified (do not have a medical degree) should report to, or have access to a medically qualified person." MHRA, Qualified Persons for Pharmacovigilance, http://www.mhra.gov.uk/home/idcp/l?IdcService=SS_GET_PAGE&nodeId=680 (last visited Oct. 1, 2008).

\textsuperscript{184} See Volume 9A, supra note 173, at 19 (describing the role of the QPPV as overseer of the pharmacovigilance QPPV); see also MHRA, supra note 183 (listing that a QPPV is responsible for "[t]he establishment and maintenance of a system which ensures that information about all suspected adverse reactions which are reported to the personnel of the registration holder . . . is collected and collated in order to be accessible at least at one point within the Community").

\textsuperscript{185} See Council Regulation 726/2004, art. 24, 2004 O.J. (L 136) 1 (EC) (ordering the creation of safety reports and describing their distribution); see also MHRA, supra note 183 (listing the responsibilities of the QPPV).

\textsuperscript{186} See Goldman, supra note 16, at 524. QPPV serves as an advocate for compliance of pharmacovigilance activities. U.S. currently has no one like QPPV in its system. \textit{Id}. The criminal and financial liability extends to the institution that authorizes the product. See Matthews & Wilson, supra note 16, at 416.

\textsuperscript{187} Volume 9A, supra note 173, at 21–25 (describing the requirements of MAH in applying for its authorization and how it is to maintain its pharmacovigilance program).

\textsuperscript{188} See \textit{Id}. at 29 (providing guidance on pharmacovigilance inspections); see also Patricia Fitzgerald, \textit{Pharmacovigilance Inspections}, 40 \textit{Indian J. of Pharmacology} S21, S21 (2008) (detailing inspection procedures in the UK).
programs, such as the UK’s Medicine and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), generally conduct these inspections. Routine inspections are used to determine whether a MAH has the necessary personnel, systems, and facilities in place to meet its regulatory obligations. ‘For cause’ inspections are those that are triggered by safety issues, suspected violations of pharmacovigilance legislation, or by request of the CHMP. MHRA requires MAHs to complete a Summary of Pharmacovigilance Systems (SPS), which assists the MAH and the Inspectorate to prepare for the inspection. The Pharmacovigilance Inspectorate Unit of MHRA consists of inspectors who have acquired a certain level of expertise in their specialized fields. As a result, they are able to gain a deep understanding in their specialized areas. The inspections themselves consist of site visits during which interviews, document and computer system reviews (including searches of any pharmacovigilance databases) are performed. If a MAH fails to comply


190 See Volume 9A, supra note 173, at 30 (discussing how inspections determine that the Market Authorization Holder’s personnel, systems, and facilities are pursuant to the regulatory obligations for centrally authorized products); see also Inspections and Standards, supra note 189 (commenting that the inspections are meant to ensure that the systems and procedures used by MAHs comply with existing EU and national pharmacovigilance regulations and guidance).

191 Inspections and Standards, supra note 189; see Volume 9A, supra note 173, at 30–31. Triggers for inspection that relate to specific concerns about a product’s safety or actual non-compliance include: delays in carrying out or failure to carry out specific obligations or follow-up measures, delays in reporting, incomplete reporting, submission of poor quality or incomplete PSURs, etc. Volume 9A, supra note 173, at 31. Triggers that do not relate to concerns about a products safety are: MAH has not previously been inspected, MAH has placed their first product on the market in the EEA, MAH has recently been or is involved in merger or takeover process, and MAH has changed their system significantly. Id.

192 See Inspections and Standards, supra note 189 (explaining that MAHs are required to complete and submit a Summary of Pharmacovigilance Systems (SPS) document to the lead inspector which assists in preparing for inspection); see also MHRA Statutory Pharmacovigilance Inspection, MHRA, June 2006, available at http://www.mhra.gov.uk/home/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dId=21423&noSaveAs=1&Rendition=WEB (describing SPS as an invaluable tool used to aid the Pharmacovigilance Inspectorate in planning and preparation for upcoming inspections).


194 See Volume 9A, supra note 173, at 31 (noting that product-specific inspections require the inspector to focus specifically on a given product); Goldman, supra note 16, at 527–28 (contrasting MHRA’s Inspectorate with FDA’s inspectors).

195 See Volume 9A, supra note 173, at 29 (indicating that the results of an inspection are provided to Marketing Authorization Holder who will use the results to improve compliance and possibly as the
with pharmacovigilance legislation, the EMEA, the European Commission, or the competent Authority of the state will take necessary regulatory action.196

The chief obligation of Competent Authorities is to establish pharmacovigilance systems that are compatible with the procedures undertaken in other Member States and the Agency, in order that pertinent data may be shared between Member States and EMEA.197 Each state should have a spontaneous reporting program that allows for the collection, maintenance and organization of suspected adverse reaction reports, as well as other types of reports.198 In the centralized process, the Member States, the European Commission, and the EMEA, all have unique roles and responsibilities that contribute to the overall pharmacovigilance process.199 Member States must be able to provide adverse reaction information to the EMEA, and identify safety concerns through a national pharmacovigilance system.200 The EMEA’s role is to continuously collect and coordinate information on pharmacovigilance systems for all centrally authorized products.201 The European Commission serves as the enforcement of legal
requirements and decisions by Member States and MAHs.\textsuperscript{202} Under mutual recognition, the Reference Member State (the first state that approved the drug), usually leads in the analysis and monitoring of such serious adverse reactions.\textsuperscript{203} Clearly, Volume 9A provides much greater detail as to which pharmacovigilance activities should be covered by written procedures and better reflects both the latest methods and risk management paradigm that prevails internationally.\textsuperscript{204}

\textbf{B. Japan}

In Japan, postmarketing surveillance of pharmaceuticals and medical devices is of greater importance than premarket and manufacturing functions.\textsuperscript{205} Unlike the U.S., Japan devotes much of its time and effort into regulating postmarket activities. Japan focuses on precautionary phases and early intervention, as well as the reexamination/reevaluation periods to ensure the drug's continuing safety and efficacy.\textsuperscript{206} In recent years, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) has increased its

\textsuperscript{202} See Volume 9A, supra note 173, at 132. The European Commission is responsible for “[e]nforcement of legal requirements and enforcement of the implementation of Decisions by Member States and Marketing Authorization Holders.” \textit{Id.} The Rapporteur is responsible for evaluating and reaching conclusions on issues of post-authorization for centrally authorized drugs. \textit{Id.} The regulation sets forth procedures to be taken by the Commission when a manufacturer or importer is suspected of failing to meet obligations set forth by the governing Directive, 2001/83/EC, on the Community code relating to medicinal products for human use. See Commission Regulation 726/2004, \textit{supra} note 198, art. 20.

\textsuperscript{203} See Volume 9A, \textit{supra} note 173, at 138. RMS has the responsibility for evaluating all safety concerns relevant to MRP or DCP products for providing Assessment Reports to the CMS. \textit{Id.} The CHMP Pharmacovigilance Working Party (PhVWP) serves as the discussion forum for all safety concerns relating to the mutual recognition process. \textit{Id.} Authorization Holders are required to obtain information regarding all suspected serious adverse reactions from the reference Member State. See Council Directive 2001/83/EC, art. 104(5)-104(6), 2001 O.J. (L311) 96.

\textsuperscript{204} See Goldman, \textit{supra} note 16, at 527 (arguing that the Volume 9A guidelines “provide much greater detail as to which pharmacovigilance activities should be covered by written procedures, and better reflect both the latest methods and risk management paradigm that prevails internationally”); see also Schanz, \textit{supra} note 7, at 495–97 (noting that in 2007, the Institute of Medicine released a report titled “The Future of Drug Safety,” which found the FDA’s postmarketing study commitments to be lacking in priority).


\textsuperscript{206} See Neckers, \textit{supra} note 12, at 306 (stating that early postmarketing phase vigilance is one of Japan’s several initiatives to enhance prominence in the medical industry); see also Yahiro & Nakai, \textit{supra} note 205 (noting that Japan’s revisions to PAL was an effort to ensure the safety and efficacy of medical products).
One of the main goals of the revised Pharmaceutical Affairs Law of 2002 (PAL) was to reinforce postmarketing safety regulations, by including reexamination of new drugs, and the reevaluation of drugs. With the revised PAL, came the establishment of the revised Good Post-marketing Surveillance Practice (GPMSP) law, which was then divided into two parts. The first component, the Good Post-marketing Study Practice (GPSP) involves the collection and preparation of materials for reexamination and reevaluation. The GPSP specifies items that are to be strictly complied with in order to achieve appropriate post-marketing surveillance and studies conducted by manufacturers/distributors, and to assure the reliability of data submitted when applying for reexamination or reevaluation. The GPSP consists of twelve articles. Manufacturers or


208 See Neckers, supra note 12, at 298 (stating that the PAL was revised based on demands for augmentation of safety assurance in keeping with the age of modern science and policies); JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at 13 (explaining that the revisions were meant to address the enhancements in the development and safety of new medical products in the twenty-first century).

209 See JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at 103-04. The original GPMSP was merely an administrative notification, rather than official law. Id. at 103. Under the 2004 PAL, the GPSMP was "separate[ed] between the part that deals with the collection, preparation and consideration of information for appropriate use of post-market safety measures . . . and the part that deals with tests and surveillance conducted to collect and prepare materials for reexamination and reevaluation." Id. at 104. Katharine Neckers' article traces the development of PAL law. See generally Neckers, supra note 12, at 297–98.

210 JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at 104 (stating that in the revised PAL enforced in 2004, there is a separation between the part that deals with the collection, preparation and consideration of information for appropriate use of post-market safety measures of the MHLW Ordinance on GPMSP related to the implementation of safety assurance measures, and the part that deals with tests and surveillance conduct to collect and prepare materials for reexamination and reevaluation); see also Neckers, supra note 12, at 324 (claiming that postmarketing surveillance is perhaps the most crucial phase in the development and manufacturing process of new drugs and devices and without such strict regulations, recalls will continue in the future).

211 See JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at 104 ("These standards set forth the items that must be strictly complied with by manufacturers/distributors of drugs in conducting post-marketing surveillance and studies."); see also Neckers, supra note 12, at 324 (claiming that postmarketing surveillance is perhaps the most crucial phase in the development and manufacturing process of new drugs and devices and without such strict regulations, recalls will continue in the future).
distributors of drugs conduct post-marketing surveys for the purpose of collecting, screening, confirming or verifying information that relates to the quality, efficacy, and safety of drugs.\textsuperscript{213} Compliance surveys are an integral part of the reexamination and reevaluation processes of the GPSP.\textsuperscript{214} These surveys are performed by employees of the Pharmaceutical and Medical Devices Agency (PMDA) and are used as the basis of a data compliance survey – after which a determination of the manufacturer’s compliance or non-compliance is made.\textsuperscript{215}

The second component, the “Good Vigilance Practice” (GVP), “establishes standards for post-marketing safety management related to the collection, preparation, and study of proper use of information on drugs, etc., and to the implementation of measures for safety assurance.”\textsuperscript{216} The GVP is outlined in sixteen articles.\textsuperscript{217} A recent initiative called early phase postmarketing vigilance (EPPV) aims “to have pharmaceutical companies provide and draw attention of medical professionals to accurate information

\textsuperscript{212} JPMA, ERTIF, \textit{supra} note 207, at 104–08. Article 1 states the purpose of the GPSP standards. \textit{Id.} at 104. Article 2 defines terms such as post-marketing surveys, drug use-result survey, special drug use-results survey, and post-marketing clinical study. \textit{Id.} at 105. Article 3 specifies standard operating procedures for post-marketing surveillance. \textit{Id.} at 105. Article 4 declares the obligations of supervisors of post-marketing surveys. \textit{Id.} at 106. Article 5 specifies the use of post-marketing surveys. \textit{Id.} at 106. Article 6 specifies the use of drug use-results surveys. \textit{Id.} at 107. Article 7 specifies the use of post-marketing clinical studies. \textit{Id.} at 107. Article 8 provides rules concerning in-house inspections. \textit{Id.} at 107. Article 9 details the education and training that a supervisor of post-marketing surveys must have. \textit{Id.} at 107. Article 10 delegates duties of post-marketing surveys. \textit{Id.} at 108. Article 11 describes the process of preserving records in connection with post-marketing surveys. \textit{Id.} at 108. Article 12 sets the standards for compliance of reexamination and reevaluation of data in connection with post-marketing surveillance. \textit{Id.} at 108.

\textsuperscript{213} \textit{Id.} at 105 (clarifying that drug use-results surveys, special drug use-results surveys, and post-marketing clinical studies are other examples of surveys that are conducted by drug manufacturers); see Neckers, \textit{supra} note 12, at 306 (reporting that cooperation from regulatory authorities and healthcare providers in funding these postmarket surveillance systems is also necessary for vast improvement).

\textsuperscript{214} See JPMA, ERTIF, \textit{supra} note 207, at 108 (noting that the surveys are implemented in accordance with the Guidance for Implementation of GPSP On-site surveys established by the MHLW); see also \textit{The Working Group, The Japan Society for Precision Engineering, Future Postmarketing Surveillance (PMS) in Japan} 4 (Yuka Ohgaki, Fumiko Miyaji, & Mikihito Kosuge trans., 2003) [hereinafter \textit{Japan Society for Precision Engineering}], available at http://www.jspe.jp/pms_pdf/pms_en.pdf (specifying the ADR/infection reporting, reexamination and reevaluation as the major regulatory requirements for marketed drugs in Japan).

\textsuperscript{215} See JPMA, ERTIF, \textit{supra} note 207, at 1 (explaining the role of PMDA); see also Neckers, \textit{supra} note 12, at 315 (describing PMDA as the cornerstone of Japan’s medical product regulation).

\textsuperscript{216} JPMA, ERTIF, \textit{supra} note 207, at 109.

\textsuperscript{217} \textit{Id.} at 109–17. Article 1 establishes the purpose of GVP. \textit{Id.} at 109. Article 2 lists definitions of terms: safety management information, quality assurance activities, early post-marketing surveillance, and persons in charge of drug information and medical device information. \textit{Id.} Articles 3 to 12 specify the duties and obligations of general manufacturing/distribution supervisors. \textit{Id.} at 109–16. Article 13 provides standards for post-marketing safety management of type 2 manufacturers/distributors. \textit{Id.} at 116. Article 14 provides standards for post-marketing safety management of type 3 manufacturers/distributors. \textit{Id.} Article 15 describes retention of records related to safety assurance. \textit{Id.} Article 13 and 14 both deal with standards for post-marketing safety management of type 2 manufacturers/distributors. \textit{Id.}
and promote understanding of proper use over a period of 6 months from the launch of new products. . . .”218 This rapid collection of information on serious adverse reactions would allow the MHLW to minimize the harmful effects that people may experience.219 This postmarketing vigilance phase is invaluable because it produces “thorough dissemination of information on proper use and early acquisition of ADR information.”220

Like the U.S. and EU, Japan also has an adverse drug reaction reporting system, however, as previously mentioned, Japan implemented additional systems for reexamination and reevaluation.221 The three main bodies of the reporting system are: the MHLW’s drug safety information reporting system, the adverse drug reaction reporting system by pharmaceutical companies, and the World Health Organization’s (WHO’s) International Drug Monitoring Program.222 The MHLW’s system collects safety information from health professionals and all medical institutions and pharmacies directly.223 Any adverse event, including well-known adverse events, associated with the drug must be reported.224

Pharmaceutical companies, in accordance with the PAL, are obligated to report adverse drug reactions and infections, serious cases, as well as regulatory information, such as measures adopted in foreign countries to


219 See JPMA, One Year After, supra note 218 (stating that EPPV requests “companies to cooperate in collection of ADR information and to take the necessary safety measures”); see also Akira Kawahara, Post-Marketing Safety Measures in Japan, Apr. 2008, at 36, available at http://www2.convention.co.jp/eaper2008ph/presen/0414-B2-03.pdf (noting that the MHLW/PMDA’s mission statement is “to ensure faster access to more effective and safer pharmaceuticals, medical devices for the public”).

220 Neckers, supra note 12, at 309 (quoting JAPAN SOCIETY FOR PRECISION ENGINEERING, supra note 214, at 15).

221 See JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at 24 (providing the necessary procedures that manufacturers/distributors must perform as part of the reexamination and reevaluation process); see also Neckers, supra note 12, at 307 (stating that unlike Japan, “the United States does not employ re-examination and re-evaluation requirements”).


223 See JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at 117 (stating that “the reporting format has been simplified in order to further increase the number of reports from physicians, dentists, and pharmacists”); see also Kawahara, supra note 219, at 12–13 (outlining two models of information flow).

224 JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at 117–19. Only “mild, well-known adverse events” do not have to be reported. Id. at 117. Certain adverse events must be reported within 15 days when they are first known, while others must be reported within 30 days. Id. at 118–19.
discontinue manufacturing and/or distribution of a drug due to safety concerns. Certain adverse drug reactions are required to be reported within fifteen days of the time that they are first discovered. These cases include: death, disability, and any other serious problems that may lead to death. Other types of adverse reactions are to be reported within thirty days from the time that they are first known. The WHO’s international drug monitoring program collects data from member states, creates a summary of the results, and sends the summary report to each country. The information that the MHLW receives from the other two bodies of the system is then evaluated and any results must be approved by the PAFSC. Any administrative and regulatory action is also determined at this stage.

Japan’s reexamination system is “aimed at reconfirmation of the clinical usefulness of drugs by performing GPSP or GVP as one aspect of PMS [Postmarketing Strategy], through collecting information on the efficacy


226 See JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at 118. This fifteen-day requirement was “intended to assure focused supervision of serious cases caused by adverse reactions of drugs with little post-market clinical experience and to coordinate reporting criteria for adverse drug reactions with international standards.” Id. Article 62-2 of the Enforcement Regulations requires adverse reactions to be reported by the manufacturer or in-country caretaker to the MHW. See G.R. Higson, MEDICAL DEVICE SAFETY: THE REGULATION OF MEDICAL DEVICES FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY 88 (2002).

227 JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at 118–19 (stating examples of adverse drug reactions that must be reported to the MHLW within fifteen days); see HIGSON, supra note 226, at 88 (noting that in addition to death and disability, adverse reactions that are caused by suspected deficiencies in medical devices used in Japan must also be reported within fifteen days).

228 JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at 119 (listing the cases that “must be reported within 30 days from the time they are first known”); see HIGSON, supra note 226, at 88 (distinguishing the adverse drug reactions that must be reported within thirty days, as opposed to fifteen).


230 JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at 8, 120. The MHLW evaluates drug safety information received in consultation with PAFSC regarding adverse drug reactions. Id. at 120. The Pharmaceutical Affairs and Food Sanitation Council (PAFSC) advises the MHLW, and reviews and discusses important pharmaceutical and food sanitation-related matters. Id. at 8.

231 See JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at 120. Administrative decisions are made as a result of consultations with the PAFSC regarding adverse drug reactions. Id. The MHLW can suspend the manufacturing or distribution of a drug, recall a drug, revoke approval, change its dosage, and order emergency safety information to be circulated, etc. Id. The most frequent type of action taken is requiring notification to health professionals, through revised versions of package inserts. Id. The administrative actions performed by the MHLW reflect the information gathered in postmarketing surveillance of drugs. See ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BIOPHARMACEUTICAL STATISTICS 628 (Shein-Chung Chow ed., 2d ed. 2003).
and safety of the drug during a specified period of time after approval. Under this article, pharmaceutical companies must perform postmarketing surveillance of their drugs within a certain number of years after their approval, to be decided by the MHLW. Whereas reexamination focuses on ensuring the drug’s level of efficacy, the reevaluation system concentrates on the quality and safety of the drug in the context of current medical and pharmaceutical sciences. The MHLW first selects certain ingredients in drugs to review, and an initial review is performed by the PMDA, who then discusses their data with PAFSC. Once reevaluation has been designated, the PMDA performs the reevaluation and submits their results on the drug’s quality of efficacy and safety to the PAFSC to be published.

III. REFORMS

A recent report by current and former members of the FDA’s Drug Safety and Risk Management Advisory Committee pinpoints several flaws of drug regulation. The members called for a “reorganization of the
agency with emphasis on strengthening the evaluation and proactive monitoring of drug safety," among other things. The first step towards reorganization that the FDA can make is to develop a current set of guidelines and regulations to which drug manufacturers and FDA employees can refer. The FDA has recently taken some initiative in the postmarketing program, yet these newly proposed regulations have not been officially released or published. The FDA must promulgate regulatory standards that "provide [the industry] with clearly written, regularly updated documents" in order to encourage compliance. In comparison to its European and Asian counterparts, the FDA is clearly lacking in this crucial area of pharmacovigilance. Europe's Volume 9A of the Rules Governing Medicinal Products in the European Union is a complete and updated set of guidelines for postmarketing pharmacovigilance regulation. Likewise, Japan's report from JPMA's English Regulatory Information Task Force, contains practices and regulations of the pharmaceutical industry that are updated twice a year. In the U.S., the most current guidance on postmarketing safety for drugs is based on regulations that were promulgated in 1997. A current set of principles and guidelines for all parties to rely upon will provide the foundation that the FDA needs to emphasize the importance of monitoring drugs.

Cder/audiences/acspage/DSaRMcharter.htm (last visited Oct. 1, 2008).

238 Furberg et al., supra note 117, at 1.

239 See Goldman, supra note 16, at 514 ("[I]t is incumbent upon national competent authorities to promote regulatory standards that reflect the latest scientific developments, and provide regulated industry with clearly written, regularly updated documents that foster compliance."); see also Furberg et al., supra note 117, at 3 (asserting that the FDA needs to have "additional and clearer authority").

240 See Goldman, supra note 16, at 514 (noting that release of rules and regulations have been delayed); Furberg et al., supra note 117, at 1 (asserting that "there has been no meaningful change in our regulatory approach to drug safety during the past decades").

241 Goldman, supra note 16, at 514.

242 See supra notes 180–204 and accompanying text (describing the breadth and efficiency of Volume 9A).

243 See generally JPMA, ERITF, supra note 207, at iii–vii. The JPMA English Regulatory Information Task force meets twice a year to review any updates in: (1) the "Organization and Function of the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare"; (2) "Pharmaceutical Laws and Regulations"; (3) "Drug Development" Activities by the Industry and their evaluation by the Ministry; (4) "Postmarketing Surveillance of Drugs"; (5) "Dissemination of Drug Information"; and (6) Health Insurance Programs and Drug Pricing." Id.

244 Goldman, supra note 16, at 516 (explaining how rules proposed in 2003 have not been finalized and as a result the 1997 rules still govern); see Stephens' DETECTION OF NEW ADVERSE DRUG REACTIONS 433 (John Talbot & Patrick Waller eds., 5th ed. 2004) (stating that the FDA proposed rule changes to the 1997 rules, but those proposed rules have yet to be enacted).

245 See Furberg et al., supra note 117, at 1 (noting that there have been only small changes made to the regulatory approach in the past few decades, none of which have changed the status quo in any meaningful way); see also Further Actions Needed to Improve FDA’s Postmarket Decision-Making Process: Hearing on Drug Safety Before the Subcomm. on Health, Comm. on Energy and Commerce,
For its next mission, the FDA should focus on improving its monitoring of postmarketing study commitments that drug sponsors agree to conduct. Similar to the QPPV in Europe, each drug sponsor should have one executive that is responsible for maintaining a postmarketing system. This executive should be held criminally liable for failure to fulfill any of their postmarketing monitoring obligations, as personal responsibility will serve as an incentive for ensuring an effective postmarketing system. Also, the FDA must receive more statutory tools for monitoring commitments and ASRs, and for ensuring that commitments are being completed according to schedule. Within the past few years, Congress has been pressured to provide the FDA with stronger enforcement tools. For failure to complete postmarketing studies within the time specified, The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Accountability Act of 2005, introduced by Representatives Stark and Berry, proposes fines of up to $5 million for each month the study remains incomplete. Because of the FDA’s unsubstantiated threat of withdrawal, companies often “drag their feet on studies.” However, with this bill,
companies will no longer hesitate to fulfill their commitments in order to avoid liability and fines. The FDA should have legal authority to require industry compliance and completion of postmarketing studies through the use of fines and injunctions.

Other suggestions for enforcing completion of these studies include: instructing drug applicants to provide additional and meaningful information on their annual status reports, improving their own management information system, and ensuring that FDA reviewers are fulfilling their own responsibilities in overseeing the completion of these commitments. Drug applicants should be instructed to include more than just a description and schedule of their commitments. Submission of study protocols, completion dates, and final reports can serve as signals that companies have completed one stage and are progressing towards the next. A more efficient management system would entail organizing their commitment database by study start dates, original scheduled completion dates, and final report dates. Moreover, a system that identifies late ASRs and outstanding commitments would alert reviewers of their status and eliminate the risk of the commitment being overlooked or forgotten.

253 See Daniel R. Cahoy, Medical Product Information Incentives and the Transparency Paradox, 82 IND. L.J. 623, 653–54 (2007) (noting the Act sought to ensure enforcement of FDA rules by creating serious consequences for manufacturing companies that failed to comply); see also Steenburg, supra note 2, at 368 (quoting Representative Pete Stark, as he described the lack of incentives for firms to complete their studies).

254 Kelly, supra note 85, at 3 (suggesting the Agency be provided with greater enforcement authority, and that such reinforcement mechanisms "reflect [a] widespread congressional impatience with the fact that the majority of postmarketing surveillance studies promised by companies are never completed"); see Furberg et al., supra note 117, at 5 (explaining that for postmarketing studies, the FDA needs additional and clearer authority to hold manufacturers to their commitments and to adherence to a fundamental of sound science that all study results, whether favorable or unfavorable, must be reported to the FDA in a timely manner, accompanied by disclosure to the public and/or other follow-up action; failure to meet postmarketing commitments should have clear consequences for the offenders, which could include fines, probation, public embarrassment, or even drug withdrawal).

255 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, 19–20 (arguing that the information provided does not assist in ensuring progress of postmarketing commitments); see also GAO, supra note 85, at 24 ("Data constraints—such as weaknesses in data sources and limitations in requiring certain studies and obtaining data—contribute to FDA’s difficulty in making postmarket drug safety decisions.").

256 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, 19–20 (highlighting the importance that the FDA mandate a greater level of detail in ASRs); see also Kelly, supra note 85 (commenting that tracking the progress of a company’s postmarketing commitment is a significant issue considering that "about two-thirds of the 1231 studies pending as of September 2005 had not even been initiated").

257 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 20 (positing that a more efficient system would ensure the FDA database is populated with useful information); see also Schanz, supra note 7, at 496 (stating that the FDA currently lacks a system for managing postmarket study commitments).

258 See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 20 (suggesting that by enhancing the current reporting capability, it would enable reviewers to "readily identify approved new drug applications for which
Timely review of commitment reports and ASRs by FDA reviewers are essential to this process. Although the FDA has numerous priorities and a limited staff, postmarketing commitments must be accurately and promptly monitored.

Another key improvement involves the FDA's Adverse Event Reporting System (AERS). The FDA must shift from passive surveillance of adverse events to proactive surveillance. One method is to have trained employees who specifically search for adverse events to add to an existing adverse events database. Implementing a systematic solicitation of care providers for adverse event reports, and a systematic screening of those records will provide for greater coverage of adverse events. A systematic collection of primary patient records will also yield better results. Another proactive method is for Congress to allow the FDA access to large, private and public administrative databases such as the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Defense, as well as other large health plans. This would allow the FDA to provide important safety information by linking pharmacy databases with clinical patient

ASRs are due as well as those with open commitments that are behind schedule); see also Schanz, supra note 7, at 496-97 (explaining that one-third of annual status reports on postmarketing commitments are not submitted or are incomplete, and even many completed reports lack useful information).

See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 21 (positing that in doing so, it will allow the public and medical community to be aware of the risks, benefits, and optimal uses of approved drugs); see also Steenburg, supra note 2, at 326-27 (explaining that given the potential adverse effects on American patients and the absence of absolute certainty as to all the risks associated with a drug at the time of approval, the timeliness of completing postmarketing commitments may be critical to the public safety).

See HHS OIG, supra note 42, at 21 (stating FDA must find a way to provide the information, tools, and time to its employees to complete the postmarketing studies); see also Basquill, supra note 1, at 84 ("[F]or all their responsibility, the FDA is woefully understaffed and under-funded.").

See Furberg et al., supra note 117, at 4 (advocating that a switch to active surveillance approach would be more beneficial than the passive approach); see also Gilhooley, supra note 49, at 361-62 (stating that the first step in detecting adverse affects is to implement an active surveillance system).

See Bright, supra note 11, at 611 (suggesting an employee could systematically solicit care providers, screen records for evidence of adverse effects, or download primary patient records); see also Denise Grady, Medical Journal Calls for New Drug Watchdog, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 23, 2004, at A1 (arguing that the problem with current drug tracking is that it is done by drug makers rather than independent parties).

See Bright, supra note 11, at 611-12 (stating that other writings have found that soliciting the information has produced more reports than routine reporting systems); see also Gilhooley, supra note 49, at 363 (discussing Congress' goal of covering 100,000,000 patients' records by 2012 through the active surveillance system).

See Bright, supra note 11, at 611-612 (noting findings that show solicitation revealed significant numbers that were not found through other means). See generally Neckers, supra note 12, at 303 (positing that increased reporting and vigilance will lead to decreases in drug related injuries).

See Furberg et al., supra note 117, at 4 (suggesting that Congress provide additional money and staff for the FDA to utilize these databases); see also Gilhooley, supra note 49, at 370 (stating that the law requires the FDA to publish postmarket safety information on a website to better inform patients and care providers of drug risks).
The FDA could also implement a surveillance system based on large population-based and disease-specific registries from other countries. For example, common conditions that occur internationally, such as liver or renal failure, or sudden cardiac death, could be the focus of these disease-specific registries. The FDA’s ideal surveillance program “should be based on epidemiologic principles so that inferences can be made about the specific, overall, and relative public health burdens of different types of ADE.”

Other possible reforms are to implement a policy of “conditional approvals,” or to create a system of scheduled reviews, such as those in Japan. Under conditional approvals, a drug would have a time-limited approval status, conditioned on their completion of recommended and requested postmarketing studies. For example, a study that leads to approval might include 500 patients, but 5000 might be needed to judge safety. “Conditional approval might be based on 500 patients, and the company might be told that data on 5000 will be required for full approval.” If a drug remains “conditionally approved until certain data are available, providing an incentive to collect those postmarketing data” can be another alternative. The EMEA is currently attempting to make a “1-year conditional approval a regulatory option.”

See Furberg et al., supra note 117, at 4 (positing that the FDA should routinely review drug withdrawals to find connections); see also Gilhooley, supra note 49, at 363 (noting that the FDA is taking steps to link the information from Medicare and private insurance companies to its own database). Furberg et al., supra note 117, at 4 (suggesting that the overrepresentation of suspected drugs in disease-specific databases would point to potential for harmful drug effects); see also Bright, supra note 11, at 611 (discussing registries set up in the United Kingdom to monitor adverse affects of specific drugs). Furberg et al., supra note 117, at 4 (adding that international disease-specific registries would nicely complement the FDA’s MEDWatch program); see Neckers, supra note 12, at 304 (discussing the AERS which stores various information on the safety of FDA-approved drugs). Bright, supra note 11, at 605. See Furberg et al., supra note 117, at 4 (suggesting that “[f]irst, the FDA should have a ‘conditional approval’ policy for new drugs”). See generally John R. Manthei et al., Changing the Landscape for Device Manufacturers: Medical Device User Fee and Modernization Act of 2002, 15 NO. 2 HEALTH LAW. 10, 11 (2002) (describing the Medical Device User Fee and Modernization Act of 2002 which “promises stronger pre-market and post-market controls on reprocessed medical devices that are approved or cleared for single-use only”).

See Furberg et al., supra note 111, at 4 (“A time-limited, conditional approval status would place pressure on the sponsors to conduct and report recommended safety studies.”); see also Kelly, supra note 85 (“[T]he IOM wants Congress to give the FDA legal authority to require industry compliance with FDA-initiated changes in labeling and completion of postmarketing studies, to limit distribution of certain new drugs, to restrict direct to consumer (DTC) advertising for a period after a new drug is launched, and to maintain ‘an active adverse event surveillance system.’”).

See Kelly, supra note 85.

Furberg et al., supra note 111, at 4.

Id.
systematic reviews of drugs a certain number of years after approval are another way of closely monitoring for adverse events.\textsuperscript{276} The FDA’s “system consists mainly of pharmaceutical companies’ reports of adverse drug reactions and adverse events.”\textsuperscript{277} However, a postmarketing system with more precautionary phases like Japan’s system, would create a more effective and successful system.\textsuperscript{278}

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

The FDA has enormous responsibilities concerning the approval and testing of every drug before it is released onto the market. The FDA undoubtedly continues to make valuable reforms to its drug approval process. However, the monitoring of a drug’s safety and efficacy after approval is just as important. As the international leader in the pharmaceutical market, it is imperative that the United States maintains an efficient process of regulating drugs post-approval that keeps pace with the ever-changing pharmaceutical world. The persisting problems with postmarketing must be dealt with immediately and innovatively—whether this requires using fines and injunctions as a way of creating incentive, or emulating other countries that have successfully handled similar problems. Nevertheless, these problems must be resolved.

\textsuperscript{276} See supra notes 179–183 and accompanying text (describing the workings of Japan’s monitoring system); see also Yahiro & Nakai, supra note 205 (providing information regarding the newly revised Japanese pharmaceutical laws).

\textsuperscript{277} Neckers, supra note 12, at 308.

\textsuperscript{278} See Neckers, supra note 12, at 308 (noting that in Japan, the postmarketing surveillance system requires pharmaceutical companies to complete early adverse reaction reports, clinical experience investigation, special investigations, and postmarketing clinical studies); see also Yahiro & Nakai, supra note 205 (revealing that the Japanese government “enacted sweeping revisions of the Pharmaceutical Affairs Law (PAL)” on July 31, 2002, which “reflect the government’s efforts to ensure the quality, safety, and efficacy of medical products”).