

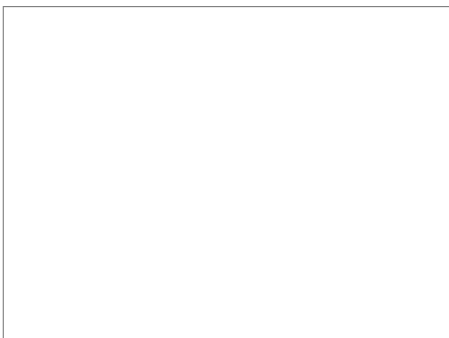
"BE assured it is not the drug that is on trial here....," Coroner Andrew Walker told Tuesday's inquest into the death of Allan Woolley, who became psychotic as a side-effect of taking cholesterol-lowering statins.

But the inquest's finding, which acknowledged psychic disturbances caused by the most popular variant of the drug, will inevitably fuel debate over their safety.

Statins are so spectacularly successful at combating heart disease – the UK's biggest killer – that some experts have called for them to be prescribed automatically to everyone over 50.

http://www.thecnj.co.uk/camden/2008/011008/news011008_01.html

Camden New Journal - By PAUL KEILTHY
Published: 10 January 2008



Allan Woolley

'SUPERDRUG' DEATH LINK?

Inquest blames cholesterol pills for psychic disturbances

A WONDER drug prescribed to millions caused "psychic disturbances" which plunged a Hampstead schoolmaster into a living nightmare and drove him to his death under a train, an inquest has ruled.

Students and colleagues at University College School were mystified and distraught when chemistry master Dr Allan Woolley, 53, was killed while standing on the tracks at North

Wembley railway station last April, holding a note which read: "Just burn my wretched body without ceremony."

But his family and friends were so convinced that suicide was out of character they insisted that his inquest examine the role played in his death by cholesterol-lowering statins, prescription "superdrugs" taken by 2.5 million people in Britain at risk of heart attacks.

On Tuesday, after hearing how the outgoing house-master's character had been transformed by nightmares, hallucinations and blackouts in the days before his death, a jury at Hornsey Coroner's Court rejected a suicide verdict.

Instead, they recorded a narrative verdict describing the circumstances of his death and concluding: "At the time of his death Allan Woolley was suffering from psychic disturbances, a known side-effect of the drug simvastatin."

Coroner Andrew Walker summoned an expert witness from the \$6 billion-per-year drug company that manufactures Zocor, the brand of simvastatin prescribed to Dr Woolley, after the teacher's sister Lorraine Bubb wrote: "My brother had no history of depression and was in full-time employment. The family believe that Allan did not intend to kill himself. My brother had had nightmares which were so terrible he could not distinguish between them and real life."

On behalf of Zocor manufacturer Merck Sharpe and Dohme, Dr Fredric Steinberg said psychic disturbances were among the "rare" side effects, adding: "That is an unspecified term, psychic disturbances. It is lumped together in that term because these events are very rare... [But] it could be depression, it could be hallucination, it could be anxiety."

He said: "Simvastatins have been licenced since 1988 and the accumulated tablets have been in the billions... Millions of people have taken it; the number of incidences – over the 20 years it has been diagnosed – of psychotic symptoms is in the range of 1,500. The number of suicides is 52."

Asked by the Woolley family's lawyer, Alan Weir, whether cases could be underreported, Dr Steinberg said: "I cannot answer that."

Statins, of which simvastatin is the cheapest of five types prescribed on the NHS, have been hailed as a superdrug for their effect on reducing cholesterol by up to 60 per cent.

Dr Woolley, who lived in Inglewood Road, West Hampstead, was prescribed simvastatin because as a diabetic with above average cholesterol he was at risk of cardio-vascular illness, despite his active

