Commonly Prescribed Osteoporosis Drug Associated with Very Low Risk of Serious Jaw Disease

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PORTLAND, Ore., Feb. 14, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- A commonly prescribed osteoporosis drug is associated with a slightly elevated risk of developing the rare, but serious condition, osteonecrosis of the jaw; nonetheless the risk remains extremely low. These findings are published online in the *Journal of Dental Research,* the official journal of the International and American Associations for Dental Research. Although the findings are provocative, study authors say they should be carefully considered against the large benefit of these drugs to prevent and treat osteoporosis.

The study was funded by the National Institutes of Health and conducted by researchers from the Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research and HealthPartners Research Foundation. The study examined medical records from nearly 600,000 patients and is part of the Dental Practice-Based Research Network — a consortium of participating practices and dental organizations committed to advancing knowledge of dental practice and ways to improve it.

"Oral bisphosphonates, usually prescribed for osteoporosis patients, appear to increase the risk of osteonecrosis of the jaw, but the risk is still very low," said the paper's lead author, Jeffrey Fellows, PhD, an investigator with the Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research. "Previous studies suggested that about one percent of oral bisphosphonate users may develop osteonecrosis of the jaw, but our study found a much lower rate, less than one-tenth of one percent. The risk is still real and patients should take necessary precautions, but they shouldn't be alarmed."

"These drugs are very helpful in treating osteoporosis and preventing fractures so for the large majority of patients the benefits of taking them far outweigh the small risk found in this study," says Michael Herson, MD, Chief of Endocrinology and Metabolism, Northwest Permanente Medical Group, which was not involved in the study. "If
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