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Doctor stopped prescribing drug after warning issued

(Continued from page 1)
 ever, he became worried - despite the manufacturer's assurance that Prepulsid was still safe when used according to guidelines. (Janssen-Ortho, the Canadian manufacturer of drug, maintains that Cisapride is to be used only for gastro-intestinal motility problems.)

"That was the last prescription of Prepulsid I was ever going to write," he said.

However, given the size of his practice (approximately 3,000 people) Dr. Mittler had no idea at that time just how many of his patients were taking Prepulsid. When asked if there was anything in the letter for him to consider contacting patients to make them stop taking the drug, Dr. Mittler said, "In hindsight, absolutely."

Young - a Grade 10 student at Oakville-Trafalgar High School who had been taking the drug off and on since 1999 - died on March 19, 2000 after her heart stopped while she was at home.

On Tuesday, Dr. Chitra Rao,

.....
"That was the last prescription of Prepulsid I was ever going to write."

—Vanessa Young's family doctor
Dr. Ron Mittler

.....
 who conducted Young's autopsy, told the inquest she believes the drug tops the list of possible causes of the cardiac arrest which killed her.

Lawyers for Janssen-Ortho postulated that excessive vomiting could cause an electrolyte imbalance - particularly in potassium - which could have triggered the arrhythmia. Dr. Rao, however, testified that Young's electrolyte balance was "within normal limits" and there was no scar tissue in her heart, which she also characterized as "normal." The only damage, she said, was from the cardiac arrest.

Janssen Pharmaceutica of Titusville, N.J. announced the

same month Young died that the drug would no longer be marketed in America after July 14, 2000 - except in special cases. Health Canada pulled Cisapride (known as Prepulsid in this country and Propulsid in the United States) from Canadian pharmacies August 7, 2000 due to the possibility of "rare, but serious, heart complications, including ... irregular heartbeat rhythms and sudden death."

Dr. Mittler, who had been Young's physician since she was 18 months old, broke down on the stand once during Thursday's testimony.

Young, who had an apparent history of forced vomiting after meals, complained to Dr. Mittler of bloating after eating. After discussing various issues with his patient - including her "distorted self image" - he said he was concerned about Young's bulimic tendencies. While Dr. Mittler referred Young to a psychiatrist, he did not rule out an organic reason for the bloating so he had her see a gastro-

(See 'Drug' page 3)

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