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Pharmacy in Russian Duma Sees Run on Sharapova's Drug of Choice

By The Moscow Times

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Maria Sharapova

A pharmacy at the State Duma has registered a spike in demand for meldonium after Russian tennis champion Maria Sharapova failed a doping test for the recently banned drug, the Interfax news agency reported on Wednesday.

“We used to order only one box of this medicine [at a time], but now we can't seem to deliver enough,” an unidentified employee at the legislature's pharmacy said, describing the demand as panic buying, Interfax reported.

The news of Sharapova failing the anti-doping test “seemed to have served as an advertisement for meldonium,” the pharmacist was quoted as saying.

Sharapova had announced earlier this month she had tested positive for the drug at the Australian Open, adding that she had taken the medicine for a decade for health reasons.

But the International Tennis Federation and Women's Tennis Association said Sharapova had been repeatedly notified last year that meldonium would be added to the list of banned substances on Jan. 1 2016.

Meldonium, which is manufactured in Latvia, is used in Russia and other former Soviet republics to treat a variety of conditions, including chest pain, heart troubles and diabetes. A normal course of treatment for the drug is four to six weeks, according to the drug manufacturer.

It has not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the United States, and it is not licensed to be sold in Britain.

Customers at the Duma pharmacy have usually requested the drug to treat heart and vascular issues, and to prevent strokes, the pharmacy employee was quoted by Interfax as saying.

“Meldonium was added [to the Prohibited List] because of evidence of its use by athletes with the intention of enhancing performance,” the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said in a statement on March 7.

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