

Wyeth Settles Lawsuits Before Trial Over Menopause Medicines

By Sophia Pearson

July 16 (Bloomberg) -- [Wyeth](#) avoided a trial this week in Nevada by agreeing to settle two women's claims that its hormone-replacement drugs Prempro and Premarin caused their breast cancer.

The company agreed to pay an undisclosed amount to Las Vegas residents Vesta Woodhouse, 71, and Annie Woods, 61, to resolve allegations that it failed to adequately warn them about the drugs' breast cancer risks. The settlement leaves a unit of drugmaker [Pfizer Inc.](#) to face trial this week in a similar case brought by Woods over its hormone-therapy drug Provera.

Yesterday's settlement follows a New Jersey judge's July 11 ruling throwing out two similar lawsuits against Wyeth and Pfizer's Pharmacia & Upjohn unit for lack of evidence. The plaintiffs in those cases, which would have been the first to go to trial in New Jersey, failed to produce enough evidence that the companies downplayed the links between their drugs and breast cancer, Judge Jamie Happs said.

Wyeth said in March that it's facing more than 5,000 [lawsuits](#) over the menopause drugs, which are still on the market. Plaintiffs' lawyers estimate the number of cases at 10,000. Wyeth's sales of the drugs topped \$2 billion before a 2002 study found women using the medicines had a 24 percent higher risk of breast cancer.

Woodhouse and Woods were among more than 6 million women who took the pills to treat menopause symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats and mood swings. Until 1996, some menopausal women used Premarin, which contains estrogen, together with Provera, which contains progestin. That year, Wyeth combined the two substances in Prempro.

Woodhouse took Prempro for 19 months before developing breast cancer. Woods took Premarin, Provera and then Prempro for about five years before developing breast cancer.

Wyeth Response

Wyeth spokesman [Doug Petkus](#) declined to comment on the settlement. [Zoe Littlepage](#), an attorney for the women, couldn't be reached immediately for comment.

Wyeth has lost four of seven cases over menopause drugs Premarin and Prempro since they began going to trial in 2006. Upjohn has lost both cases that have gone to trial over Provera,

which came on the market in 1959. New York-based Pfizer gained Upjohn in 2003 as part of the \$54 billion acquisition of Pharmacia Corp.

Last week, a federal judge in Arkansas wiped out a \$27 million punitive award against Wyeth and Pfizer in a case over the drugs. It was the second time in five months that a judge reduced damages awarded to women who accuse Madison, New Jersey-based Wyeth of disregarding the health risks of its menopause drugs. A Nevada judge ruled in February that Wyeth should pay less than half of a \$134.1 million jury award to three women who blamed the drugs for their breast cancer.

[Wyeth](#) rose 55 cents to \$48.56 in New York Stock Exchange composite trading yesterday.

The case is Woodhouse v. Wyeth, Clark County District Court of Nevada, Eighth Judicial District (Las Vegas).

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