

\$75M verdict unsealed in Prempro-cancer case

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PHILADELPHIA — A Philadelphia jury has ordered Wyeth Pharmaceuticals to pay a woman \$75 million in punitive damages after finding a link between her breast cancer and a hormone-replacement drug.

The punitive damages in the case of Connie Barton were unsealed Monday, the same day of a verdict in the case of Donna Kendall, who was awarded \$6.3 million in compensatory damages and \$28 million in punitive damages, said Esther Berezofsky, an attorney for Barton.

Last month, the jury awarded Barton \$3.75 million in compensatory damages and found Wyeth willfully hid evidence of a cancer link.

The punitive award for Barton, of Peoria, Ill., had been sealed until Monday because Kendall's case was being heard in the same courthouse. A handful of Prempro lawsuits have gone to trial out of several thousand filed across the country.

Wyeth, based in Madison, N.J., was acquired by New York drugmaker Pfizer Inc. for \$68 billion in October. A spokesman for Pfizer said the company will challenge both verdicts.

"We are disappointed with the verdicts in these cases," Pfizer spokesman Chris Loder said in a statement. "The company believes that neither the awards of punitive damages nor the liability verdicts were supported by the evidence or the law."

Barton, 64, a retired hospital records clerk from Peoria, Ill., took Prempro for five years before her 2002 cancer diagnosis.

Wyeth, in court arguments, told jurors that women are now fully informed of the risks and benefits of Prempro, a combination estrogen-progestin pill.

Kendall, 66, of Decatur, Ill., took combination estrogen-progestin therapy for 11

years from 1991 to 2002, including the last four years on Prempro, and was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2002, said her attorney, Tobi Millrood.

In her case, Wyeth was ordered to pay \$16 million of the punitive damages and Upjohn Co., which is now a division of Pfizer, was ordered to pay \$12 million, Millrood said.

"Today's verdict is a resounding victory not only for Donna Kendall but for women around the country," Millrood said.

Sales of Prempro have plummeted since 2002 when a large federal health study, the Women's Health Initiative, was stopped when researchers saw more breast cancers in those on Prempro.

A study this year shows that lung cancer seems more likely to prove fatal in women who are taking the combination drug.

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