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\$34.3 million awarded in hormone therapy lawsuit

Pfizer to appeal Philadelphia jury's judgment for central Illinois woman who contracted cancer from drugs

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A Decatur, Ill., woman has been awarded \$34.3 million in compensatory and punitive damages after a state court jury in Philadelphia ruled that the hormone therapy drugs she had taken gave her breast cancer.

Over the course of 11 years, Donna Kendall took Wyeth's Premarin and Prempro and Upjohn's Provera, according to the lead law firm that represented her.

The drugs are used to treat the symptoms of menopause and remain on the market. In November 2002, she was diagnosed with invasive ductal breast cancer. By December 2003, she had undergone two mastectomies, followed by reconstruction surgery on both breasts, chemotherapy and radiation. The law firm said she continues on an anti-hormone treatment.

"Unfortunately, no amount of money will fairly compensate Donna Kendall for the suffering she has endured, but she is hopeful that the outcome ... will help avoid what has happened to her from happening to other women in the future," Tobias Millrood of the Conshohocken, Pa., law firm of Pogust Braslow and Millrood said in a statement Monday. Millrood said a jury Friday awarded Kendall punitive damages of \$28 million and compensatory damages of \$6.3 million.

Pfizer Inc., which owns Wyeth and Upjohn, said in a statement that it will challenge the Kendall verdict, as well as a similar verdict also reached in the same Philadelphia court.

"We are disappointed with the verdicts in these cases. ... The company stands by its belief that its subsidiaries acted responsibly by providing proper and accurate warnings regarding the hormone therapy medicines' risks," said spokesman Chris Loder.

The company said it has prevailed in the "vast majority" of 34 hormone therapy cases set for trial, via a combination of jury verdicts, judges' rulings and plaintiffs' dismissals.

In 2002, the National Institutes of Health's Women's Health Initiative found that the associated health risks of combination hormone therapy outweighed the benefits. The study was meant to last several more years, but, according to the NIH, was stopped after five years because of the increased risks of breast cancer, heart attack and stroke associated with the drugs.

More than 6 million women have taken hormone-replacement medicines to treat menopausal symptoms, including hot flashes, night sweats and mood swings, according to Bloomberg News. Until 1995, many patients combined Premarin, Wyeth's estrogen-based drug, with progestin-laden Provera, made by Upjohn.

Kendall said everything happened for her at once in 2002. She heard about the results of the NIH study. Shortly thereafter, at 59 years old, she discovered she had cancer.

"I didn't know what I was getting into. But my first thought was that they have got to stop telling people that this is good for them," Kendall said.

She said when she started on hormone-replacement therapy in 1991, the companies were promoting the drugs as more than just a way to relieve the symptoms of menopause.

"They said it was going to be good for Alzheimer's, good for your teeth, good for your heart, colorectal cancer," she said.

She said other friends who were on hormone-replacement drugs have also been diagnosed with cancer.

"I really couldn't tell you why I'm still here. God must want me here," she said. "I'm from central Illinois. I'm not the big city girl or the person in the spotlight. I worked in a grocery store, a common, everyday person."

Millrood said Kendall was taking 0.625 milligrams of estrogen and 2.5 milligrams of progesterone. Currently, lower dosage options exist, and many doctors are prescribing hormone replacement for shorter periods of time, said Millrood.

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