Pharmaceutical giant Pfizer has been ordered to pay $142 million US in damages for fraudulently marketing gabapentin, an anti-seizure drug marketed under the name Neurontin.

A federal jury in Boston ruled Thursday that Pfizer fraudulently marketed the drug and promoted it for unapproved uses. The jury sided with California-based Kaiser Foundation Health Plan Inc. and Kaiser Foundation Hospitals, the first to try a gabapentin case against Pfizer.

Data revealed in a string of U.S. lawsuits indicates the drug was promoted by the drug company as a treatment for pain, migraines and bipolar disorder — even though it wasn't effective in treating these conditions and was actually toxic in certain cases, according to the Therapeutics Initiative, an independent drug research group at the University of British Columbia.

The trials forced the company to release all of its studies on the drug, including the ones it kept hidden.

A new analysis of those unpublished trials by the Therapeutics Initiative suggests that gabapentin works for one out of every six or eight people who use it, at best. The review also concluded that one in eight people had an adverse reaction to the drug.

"The much larger majority of people will not get any benefit and many of them will have chronic neurotoxicity or poisoning of the brain," said Dr. Tom Perry of the Therapeutics Initiative.

Dr. Harry Pollett, a pain specialist in North Sydney, N.S., calls gabapentin a so-so drug with potentially serious side-effects for patients. These include drowsiness, balance problems, fogginess and edema, or swelling.

"Weight gain is a very common problem and I see that a lot," Pollett said.

The drugs represent a waste of money for Canada's health-care system, said Perry, who questioned why some doctors continue to encourage people to take the drug even though the patients are not benefiting.

"We have been using probably somewhere in the order of around $300 million a year in Canada recently and this drug has been overused since the late 1990s," Perry said. "So, do the math. It's probably well in excess of a billion dollars."

Pfizer defends its actions and its drug. The company has already been hit with $430 million in penalties and fines for fraudulently promoting gabapentin in the U.S.

*With files from the Associated Press*

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**Story comments (130)**
brandy-s wrote:Posted 2010/03/31

at 9:50 AM ETAs one of the odd cases that gabapentin sucessfully treats pain for, I have to ask; why is it
that a drug must be perfect and universal for it to be used? The myriad of other "traditional" pain med
thrown at me did nothing for the pain and caused such severe dizziness and nausea they would not have
been worth taking even if they did help the pain. If it were not for gabapentin I would still be trapped in
bed, if the pain hadn't caused me to starve to death or slit my wrists by now. So thank you, who ever it was
that did what ever research that discovered that this drug also works on pain for some people. I never
thought I would stand up for a drug company, but it is because of them I can stand today.

1 Agree
4 Disagree

robsaw wrote:Posted 2010/03/30

at 1:02 PM ETWLGuy wrote:
"Capitalism 101 says the goal is to "sell more AND reduce cost." This just seems to be a fundamental
problem with any health-related industry, but especially big-pharma."

Unrestrained capitalism and growth by excess debt are two of the biggest issues facing the overall economy
and the environment since they produce waste through the constant drive for increasing consumption. So,
you have that right. But it applies to the unethical and immoral in all industries and in the consumer as well.
I don't see any difference between corporate pharma or corporate herbal/alternative/natural sellers. There is
plenty of evidence of blatant over-promotion of the effectiveness of their products. In fact, I believe the
"alternative" side is worse because the supporters of such products tend to dismiss rationale thought and
science and rely on totally subjective anecdotal evidence or extremely poor studies with respect to
methodology.

3 Agree
1 Disagree

hohumm wrote:Posted 2010/03/30

at 11:14 AM ETwho's sharon cook.

0 Agree
0 Disagree

hohumm wrote:Posted 2010/03/30

at 11:14 AM ETTHEY'RE doing the ARITHMETIC (no-brainer).

1 Agree
0 Disagree

knock1 wrote:Posted 2010/03/30

at 12:15 AM ETAs a mental health patient for over 35 years.I have run the gamut of drugs to affect relief
for my illness.The confidence I have had in psychiatrists and family physicians,when dependant on them for
relief ie. treatment, has diminished over the years due to the cookie cutter approach to my illness and the
willingness for them to prescribe the new 'kid on the block' medications in haste without truly knowing the
full impact of what they prescribe. Neurontin, prescribed to me a decade ago was presented as an accepted
and effective drug. Did the doctors know different ,were they misinformed by the marketers of the drug,did
they ask the important questions, did they really know what they were doing and did they care? Was it just business ie. tickets to the big concert, big game or big life? Drug companies can't be trusted, obviously, so where does that put the doctors? Neurontin created more problems for me than it did relief. WE need humans to face the consequences of fraud, not just the company. The pharmacists are a good resource for information and can be trusted......I hope!

5 Agree 2 Disagree Policy Report abuse

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