

First Celebrex lawsuit going to trial

Alabama woman sues Pfizer; blames Celebrex for her 2005 stroke.

By Aaron Smith, CNNMoney.com staff writer
February 27, 2006: 5:32 PM EST

NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com staff writer) - The first Celebrex lawsuit in the country, filed by a stroke survivor against the drug giant Pfizer, is going to trial this year.

Rosie Ware, a 53-year-old Alabama resident who had suffered from hypertension, was taking the arthritis painkiller Celebrex when she suffered a stroke in February, 2005, and she sued the maker of the drug, Pfizer, according to plaintiff law firm Beasley Allen.

The case has been set for trial on June 6, 2006 at the Circuit Court of Barbour County in Alabama, according to Jere Beasley, the attorney for the plaintiff.

"As far as I know, this will be the first Celebrex case to be tried in the country," Beasley said.

The lawfirm, Beasley Allen, said Ware's stroke "cost her substantial sums of money for medical, hospital and related care," but Beasley declined to specify the damages that the plaintiff is seeking, although he did say "we're going to ask for a lot."

Celebrex is a member of the same drug class as Bextra, which is also made by [Pfizer](#) (up \$0.23 to \$26.60, [Research](#)), and Vioxx, made by [Merck](#) (up \$0.26 to \$35.36, [Research](#)). The class of three drugs, known as the Cox-2 inhibitors, once totaled about \$8 billion in annual sales altogether. But trouble for the Cox-2 inhibitors emerged in September of 2004, when Merck pulled Vioxx off the market after a study showed an increased risk of heart attacks and strokes in patients who took the drug for at least 18 months. Since that time, nearly 10,000 lawsuits have been filed against Merck by former Vioxx patients and their families. Merck [lost the first](#) lawsuit but won two cases in [New Jersey](#) and one in [New Orleans](#), with a [fifth case](#) ongoing and a [sixth beginning](#) this week.

The trouble for Pfizer began in April, 2005, when the Food and Drug Administration asked the company to take Bextra off the market because of health risks. Celebrex is the only one of the three drugs to remain on the market, but sales have been cut in half, to \$1.7 billion in 2005 from \$3.3 billion in 2004. In July of 2005, the FDA had Pfizer add a "black box," the most severe type of health warning, to the Celebrex label to reflect risks of heart attacks, strokes and gastrointestinal bleeding.

"The FDA, [European Agency for Evaluation of Medicinal Products] and other health authorities around the world have concluded that the benefits of Celebrex continue to outweigh the risks, and as a result, Celebrex is the only Cox-2 inhibitor remaining on the market today," said Pfizer spokesman Bryant Haskins.

Pfizer, based in New York City, is the world's biggest drug company, with \$51.3 billion in 2005 sales. Pfizer makes the world's top selling drug Lipitor, a cholesterol reducer that totaled \$12.2 billion in 2005 sales.

Beasley Allen has filed 150 cases against Pfizer and most of them are consolidated in Federal Court in California.

What does the future look like for Celebrex, Vioxx and Bextra? [Click here](#) to find out. ■

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