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March 25, 2008, 8:17 am

[Visit WSJ.com's Health Page](#)**Zyprexa: Balancing Serious Side Effects With Serious Illness**

Posted by Jacob Goldstein



Lawyers for the state of Alaska have spent weeks [arguing in an Anchorage courthouse that Eli Lilly hid the dangers of its antipsychotic drug Zyprexa](#) — a claim Lilly denies.

In a state courtroom one floor down, a less remarked upon case earlier this month illuminated the complex questions patients and doctors have to wrestle with when deciding whether to use imperfect but often helpful antipsychotic drugs to treat profound mental illness.

A 55-year-old man named William Bigley, in court for a hearing to decide whether he should be sent against his will to a psychiatric hospital, told the judge that Zyprexa and similar antipsychotics were 'poison' and he did not need them, [the New York Times reports](#). "I'm fine," he said. He also said he knows President Bush, owns a private jet and has seen flying saucers.

Bigley has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, and he's been in and out of treatment for more than 20 years. He's taken Zyprexa, Risperdal, Haldol and Thorazine, among other antipsychotic drugs. But he hasn't been known to be violent or suicidal.

In Alaska, a patient has to be violent, suicidal or a danger to himself to be hospitalized against his will. So the judge in Bigley's case let him go, against the recommendations of doctors who believed his erratic behavior could easily get him into physical trouble with the police or others.

Meanwhile, the legal fight continues over whether Lilly concealed Zyprexa's side effects — which can include weight gain and an increased risk of diabetes — to protect sales of the multi-billion-dollar drug.

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This is all much ado about nothing. Lilly should have immunity from suit and should not even be questioned by outside scientists! This action is an outrage. The people at Lilly would never put a drug on the market that was not safe and effective. There should be a law against even questioning their positions on this wonderdrug.

Comment by Tort Reform - March 25, 2008 at [8:43 am](#)

Tort Reform's comments are right on target. If we can't trust Eli Lilly, next thing you know, people will start calling Vice President Dick Cheney an evil person who has total disdain for the American people.

Quoting Dick Cheney's response when ABC's Martha Raddnitz asked him to comment on a recent poll that 2/3 of Americans don't like the way the war in Iraq is going:

Cheney, after a five second pause, "So."

Comment by Anonymous - March 25, 2008 at [9:00 am](#)

I assume you're being sarcastic.

Comment by HA! - March 25, 2008 at [9:03 am](#)

I'm a psychologist and have seen wonders worked by Zyprexa. At the same time, there are serious side effects and diabetes risk is one of them. Diabetes is so much more dangerous for psychotic individuals who are already very disorganized and cannot manage their lives never mind a persistent day-to-day disease like diabetes. Hence, as with most drugs, there are risks and benefits that have to be balanced. In considering this issue, having THE FACTS about risks and benefits is the only way to talk intelligently.

Comment by Doug - March 25, 2008 at [9:44 am](#)

Zyprexa qualifies for a MedGuide warning:

- (1) The labeling would definitely help prevent serious adverse events;
- (2) Few patients would be willing to take the drug and risk developing diabetes given that numerous studies have shown Zyprexa to be no more effective than the older class of antipsychotics that do not cause diabetes; and
- (3) Most patients on Zyprexa would learn that the drug is not FDA approved to treat the condition they have.

Zyprexa is considered by the Doctors in my clinic hometown Bangor Maine as the Worst offender of the atypicals.

Comment by Daniel Haszard - March 25, 2008 at [9:50 am](#)

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WSJ's Health Blog offers news and analysis on health and the business of health. The lead writer is Jacob Goldstein. He came to The Wall Street Journal from the Miami Herald, where he was a medical writer. Scott Hensley, who covered the drug industry as a reporter for the Journal for

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