Johnson & Johnson Allegedly Pushed Opioids, say Witness in Trial

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As the Oklahoma trial against Johnson & Johnson for their alleged role in the opioid crisis continues, the state?s star witness told a state judge that the company pressed doctors to prescribe its painkillers even as the potentially fatal addictive threat posed by the drugs became clear more than a decade ago.

The judge, Thad Balkman, is presiding over the non-jury case and will make the final decision in the first trial where a state seeks to hold a drug maker responsible for contributing to the US opioid crisis. Oklahoma is seeking $13 billion in damages from Johnson & Johnson.

Dr. Andrew Kolodny, co-director of opioid policy research at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, testified during the third week of the trial. The doctor said that Johnson & Johnson ?did everything it possibly could to get doctors to prescribe more and more opioids.?

Oklahoma Attorney General Mike Hunter also claims that Johnson & Johnson?s unit caused a health crisis under the public nuisance theory of law, in an attempt to hold the company accountable for the

epidemic. This is traditionally deployed to address real estate disputes over chemical spills, loud noises, etc.

The Oklahoma trial will serve as a preview of how similar claims may play out, as drug makers are facing lawsuits all over the country. Purdue Pharma, the company that created OxyContin is facing thousands of charges across multiple states due to their alleged role in the opioid epidemic. Over 130 Americans are dying from opioid-related overdose every day. Click the link to see Syracuse's top rehab placement programs.

Cities and counties contend that they have spent billions in tax dollars on the societal fall-out from opioid-related overdoses and addictions. This is why they are seeking settlements from large drug manufacturers who allegedly used marketing techniques that downplayed the addictive properties of opioids.

An Oklahoma bench trial that started May 28 could take 2-3 months. A deal may be unlikely during trial unless the state makes concessions, given it would show weakness on the part of Johnson & Johnson.

Kolodny told Balkman that Johnson & Johnson profited even more from the crisis through its ownership of Australian poppy cultivator Tasmanian Alkaloids, which sold its active ingredient to other opioid makers including the company?s former co-defendants in the Oklahoma case, Purdue Pharma and Teva Pharmaceutical.

Johnson & Johnson has since sold the business. In March, Purdue reached a settlement for $270 million. Teva agreed to pay $85 million days before the trial started on May 28.

Johnson & Johnson maintain they legally promoted and sold their Fentanyl-based Duragesic pain patch. They said that the company should not be held responsible for the misdeeds of other companies.

Johnson & Johnson?s defense attorney Larry Ottaway noted that other companies had settled when his client had not, saying at the trial?s outset: ?when you are right, you fight.?

Another lawyer for Johnson & Johnson said: ?the testimony of Dr. Kolodny was filled with rampant speculation and conclusions not derived from facts.?

Kolodny has been active in the study and treatment of opioid addiction for more than a decade. He also worked with the New York City Health Department during the mayoral administration of Michael Bloomberg, founder and majority owner of Bloomberg News parent Bloomberg LP.

Kolodny told Balkman that Johnson & Johson, along with other opioid makers, should not market their products as hard to abuse since all have addictive qualities. They also allegedly used what the US Food and Drug Administration concluded were unreliable studies to tout Duragesic?s benefits as a pain reliever. The

company may have also violated federal law by doing head-to-head comparisons of the pain patch?s advantages over Purdue?s OxyContin.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid or alcohol addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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