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Serving the DES-exposed community since 1978

DRUG COMPANIES ORDERED TO NEGOTIATE SETTLEMENTS IN BREAST CANCER CASE

In a precedent-setting decision at the United States District Court of Massachusetts in Boston, Judge Marianne Bowler has ordered fourteen drug companies to immediately negotiate compensation for 53 women who claim their breast cancers were linked to the anti-miscarriage drug diethylstilbestrol (DES).

Jackie White, of Centerburg, OH, is one of the plaintiffs in the case. She, like the other self-described DES Daughters, was exposed to DES before birth. “I am just over the moon at this decision,” she says. “It is time for the drug companies who harmed us to be held accountable for this bad drug.”

DES was manufactured and sold primarily from the 1940s thru 1971 – but not limited to those years. It has been linked to rare reproductive cancers, infertility and breast cancer in the daughters born to women who were prescribed it. Because DES was not patented, it was made by numerous pharmaceutical firms, including Eli Lilly and Company, which was the largest producer, and E.R. Squibb & Sons, the predecessor to Bristol-Myers Squibb. DES was widely prescribed to women with problem pregnancies. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates up to 10 million Americans were exposed to it, including DES Mothers, DES Daughters, DES Sons and DES Grandchildren.

Using information collected by the National Cancer Institute DES Follow-up Study, researchers determined that DES Daughters are about two times more likely to develop breast cancer, after age 40, than unexposed women and the risk increases with age.

Washington DC Attorneys Aaron Levine and Julie Zhang called upon a team of witnesses including the Chair of Harvard’s Department of Epidemiology, and scientists from other academic institutions to present facts supporting their claim that prenatal DES exposure substantially increases the risk of breast cancer in DES Daughters over the age of forty.

DES Action USA is a nonprofit consumer group advocating for those exposed to DES. Program Director Kari Christianson calls the ruling “a huge victory, and a reminder that our DES story is not over. The DES link to breast cancer was made more than 40 years after these women were exposed to the drug. There might be other health issues we currently don’t know about but could develop as the DES community ages. Individuals

with DES in their health histories should stay aware of the latest DES research and medical screening guidelines to protect their health.”

According to Attorney Zhang, during the negotiations mandated by the judge, the plaintiffs will push for drug company funding of physician education to train doctors about the needs of their DES-exposed patients.

While 53 DES Daughters initiated this breast cancer lawsuit, more than 20 additional individuals have signed on and Zhang expects many more will do so now that word is spreading about the link between DES exposure and breast cancer.

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