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Family files suit over drug's effects

Birth defects of a 7-year-old Springfield girl are alleged to have resulted from Pfizer's drug Zoloft

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The mother of a 7-year-old Springfield girl has filed a lawsuit alleging that she suffered a birth defect due to the negligence of Pfizer, maker of the antidepressant Zoloft.

In the suit filed on her daughter's behalf, the woman says the child was born in 2005 with a malformed anal opening after the mother was prescribed and took Zoloft during pregnancy.

The child is identified only by her initials in the suit, and The Register-Guard is not publishing her mother's name to protect the girl's privacy.

The suit alleges that her birth defect and others have been associated with Zoloft (known generically as sertraline) use during pregnancy.

It was filed in federal court last week by Eugene lawyer **Michele Smith**, who said she expects the case to be consolidated with nearly 200 other birth defect cases pending against Pfizer in federal multidistrict litigation.

In such litigation, cases with similar issues involving common questions of fact are consolidated into a single court for pretrial discovery purposes, but each case remains separate and distinct and is decided on an individual basis, **Smith** said.

The lawsuit charges that Pfizer negligently marketed Zoloft to treat depression in pregnant women, even though it knew or should have known as early as 1991 that it was "unreasonably dangerous to pregnant users and their unborn children."

It says the drugmaker failed to adequately warn the consuming public, physicians and the federal Food and Drug Administration of birth defects such as those suffered by the Springfield child.

The complaint alleges that the girl's mother was prescribed Zoloft in 2004, and continued taking the drug throughout her pregnancy after being told it was safe to do so.

Her daughter was born more than a month early, the lawsuit says, with problems that included an abnormally narrow large intestine, rectum and anal canal, the suit alleges.

The girl has required multiple surgeries and medical procedures, including a colostomy, according to the complaint, and she will require lifelong medical and hospital care.

The local suit seeks unspecified economic, noneconomic and punitive damages.

Pfizer has cited “extensive science supporting the safety and efficacy of Zoloft, and the medicine carries accurate, science-based and FDA approved information on its benefits and risks.”

“Considering the large patient population, very few cases have been filed to date,” a spokesman said.

“While we have great sympathy for all families dealing with birth defects, the company stands by Zoloft and we intend to vigorously defend it.”

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