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## **Anesthesiologist Sentenced to 6 Months for Faked Research**

Robert Lowes

June 29, 2010 — Anesthesiologist Scott Reuben, MD, who pled guilty earlier this year to falsifying research on the use of analgesics such as celecoxib (*Celebrex*; Pfizer) and rofecoxib (*Vioxx*; Merck) for postoperative pain management, was sentenced in a Boston, Massachusetts, federal court last week to 6 months in prison for healthcare fraud.

In addition, the prominent 51-year-old physician must forfeit \$50,000 in assets as well as pay a \$5000 fine and \$361,932 in restitution to pharmaceutical companies that financed his research, including \$296,557 to Pfizer.

Pfizer paid for a clinical study of Dr. Reuben's on the perioperative use of celecoxib as part of multimodal analgesia for outpatient anterior cruciate ligament reconstructive surgery. Dr. Reuben reported in 2 articles published in the journal *Anesthesia & Analgesia* that he had treated 200 patients in the trial — 100 with placebo and 100 with celecoxib — and achieved success with multimodal analgesia therapy.

However, Dr. Reuben later admitted that he had not enrolled any patients in the trial but, instead, had simply made up the findings. *Anesthesia & Analgesia* and other medical journals have retracted more than 20 articles by Dr. Reuben containing fabricated data, according to the publication *Anesthesiology News*.

### **Client's Bipolar Disorder Cited as Reason Against Imprisonment**

Dr. Reuben was the former chief of the acute pain clinic at Baystate Medical Center in Springfield, Massachusetts. In addition to conducting research, Dr. Reuben spoke frequently at medical conferences and continuing medical education events, as well as in "promotional settings," about administering celecoxib and rofecoxib in combination with other analgesics to reduce postoperative pain, according to court documents.

Merck voluntarily withdrew rofecoxib from the market in 2004 after learning that the painkiller boosted the risk for heart attack, stroke, and other cardiovascular events. Celecoxib, similar to other prescription nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, carries a boxed warning about the increased risk for cardiovascular events and the potential for life-threatening gastrointestinal bleeding.

In an attempt to avoid a prison sentence for her client, Dr. Reuben's attorney in the federal court case stated that undiagnosed bipolar disorder "fueled" his misdeeds as well as contributed to multiple suicide attempts.

"This disorder does not excuse his behavior, but it provides a key to understanding his motivations," attorney Ingrid Martin stated, adding that justice would be best served by a sentence of home confinement.

Dr. Reuben could have been sentenced to a maximum of 10 years in prison. However, US District Judge Michael Ponsor indicated that the physician's mental illness factored into the 6-month sentence handed down on June 24.

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