

Mother of Teenage Suicide Pilot Sues Maker of Acne Drug She Says He Used

Dana Canedey, *New York Times*, April 16, 2002

The mother of a teenager who killed himself by flying a Cessna Plane into a Tampa high-rise office building in January has sued the maker of an acne medication, contending that the drug had made her son psychotic and suicidal.

In the lawsuit filed today in Hillsborough County Circuit Court, Julie Bishop contends that her son Charles, 15 killed himself in a psychotic episode caused by the prescription drug Accutane, which is manufactured by Hoffman-LaRoche Inc., based in Nutley, N.J.

The suit, which seeks \$70 million, argues that the drug maker is aware that the medication causes depression, psychosis, and suicidal tendencies but has kept it on the market without adequately warning users.

"The side effects of Accutane are not worth it," Ms Bishop said in a statement. "This drug needs to be pulled from the market or put under the tightest kind of regulation.

A spokeswoman for Hoffman-LaRoche, Carolyn Glenn, said the drug has been used safely by more than 13 million people since it was introduced in 1982.

The company has investigated what it characterized as minor and rare reports of psychological side effects in Accutane users, Ms Glenn said, adding, "We have come to the conclusion that there is no scientific basis to link Accutane with either depression or suicide."

In its packaging, however, the company includes warning to doctors about the possibility of suicide, and it requires patients to acknowledge in writing that they are aware of possible psychotic side effects.

Toxicology tests conducted by the county medical examiner found no Accutane in Mr. Bishop's system, but lawyers for his family insisted today that he was taking the medication twice a day when he died.

As a result of taking the drug, Mr. Bishop "became severely psychotic and lost touch with reality, consequently flying into the side of a building," said Peter McNulty, a Los Angeles lawyer for Ms. Bishop who specializes in Accutane cases.

Mr. Bishop crashed the plane into the 28th floor of the Bank of America building in Tampa on Jan. 5, shortly after taking off alone without permission from a flight school at the St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport, where he was a student.

Mr. Bishop left a note that said he was acting alone but supported the efforts of Al Qaeda, the terrorism network. The authorities have said they do not believe that the teenager had ties to terrorists. The note said Osama bin Laden was planning other terrorist acts, including "blowing up the Super Bowl with an antiquated nuclear bomb left over from the 1967 Israeli-Syrian war."

The note is an indication of the boy's psychotic state, said Michel Ryan, a lawyer in Fort Lauderdale who is also representing Ms. Bishop, "When you look at the note he wrote just before, it tells you of his psychotic thoughts and break from reality."

The lawsuit says that since the drug's introduction, more than 500 adverse reactions have been recorded by national and international health agencies. This month, a woman in Oklahoma lost a suit contending that Accutane had caused her to suffer bouts of depression.

Hoffman-LaRoche, a unit of Roche Holding AG, contends that suicide is already a leading cause of death in teenagers and young adults but said it could not comment on specific cases of current litigation.

"This population of so-called 15-24-year-olds, which is the largest user of Accutane, is a very vulnerable population," Ms. Glenn said.

Mr. McNulty, however, said Mr. Bishop's suicide "is the ultimate avoidable side effect of Accutane."

In another case, B.J. Stupak, 17 of Menominee, Mich., fatally shot himself in 2000 while taking Accutane. His father, Representative Bart Stupak, has publicized B.J.'s story and those of other Accutane users.