

4 more suits filed blaming heparin for Toledo deaths

BY ERICA BLAKE
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Two months after the first lawsuit was filed against a major drug manufacturer charging the company with selling contaminated heparin, four additional lawsuits were filed yesterday against Baxter Healthcare Corp. claiming the use of the drug led to four additional deaths.

The suits, filed in U.S. District Court in Toledo, mean seven Toledo residents have filed claims against the drug company. More have been filed nationwide.

Johanna Staples was among those who filed suits yesterday, on behalf of her husband, Dennis Staples, 60, a popular northwest Ohio radio personality who died Dec. 17.

Suits also were filed by family members of Loretta LaCourse, 78; Vivian Colquitt, 56, and Lawrence Matten, 68, all of Toledo.

According to the suits filed by attorneys with Zoll, Kranz & Borgess, each of the decedents had been receiving hemodialysis at the time of their deaths. Each also had adverse reactions just after receiving heparin, which is a blood thinner, in December as part of their treatments.

"In late 2007, these individuals began experiencing unusual and severe reactions following dialysis," a statement released by the law firm said. "These atypical symptoms are consistent with the allergic or hypersensitivity-type adverse reactions from contaminated heparin being investigated by the FDA. Each died shortly thereafter."

Attorneys declined further comment until a news conference scheduled for today, where family members will be present.

According to the suits, the Food and Drug Administration estimates more than 1 million multiple-dose vials of heparin are sold each month in the U.S. About 50 percent of that product is made by Baxter, the lawsuits said.

The suits include claims against component manufacturers Scientific Protein Laboratories of Wisconsin and the Chinese firm Changzhou SPL Co.

Scientific Protein Laboratories obtained the active ingredients for heparin from Changzhou SPL Co. in China and supplied them to Baxter, the lawsuits claimed. Changzhou obtained its ingredients from Chinese wholesalers that got the heparin from small workshops.

U.S. health regulators said last month the contaminant found in the blood thinner was over-sulfated chondroitin sulfate. Officials said they believe it was added to the drug during manufacturing in China.

The company voluntarily recalled the product in January.

A spokesman for Baxter said yesterday that to date, about 700 adverse reaction reports have been made, and she was aware of 12 suits being filed against the company. Erin Gardiner said the company had not yet been

served the four suits filed yesterday.

"At this point, none of the suits include any credible medical information to allow Baxter to medically evaluate these claims," she said, adding that the company has been able to confirm that the contaminant was introduced prior to the product reaching any of Baxter's suppliers, including Scientific Protein Laboratories and Changzhou SPL Co.

"We're still trying to understand how and why a contaminant was introduced, and we're also focusing on testing to correlate the adverse reactions and the contaminant," she said.

Ms. Gardiner said to date, there are four patient death reports where it has been confirmed that Baxter's heparin was administered and the patient died after experiencing an adverse response. But so far, there have been no deaths confirmed to have been caused by the heparin, she said.

The suits ask for damages in excess of \$75,000.

The death of Mr. Staples, who had been battling diabetes along with kidney and heart disease, was widely recognized in the Toledo area. His broadcast career spanned more than three decades, including 13 years at WRQN-FM (93.5) where he and his longtime sidekick, Bob Kelly, worked as early morning disc jockeys.

The lawsuits are in addition to three that already have been filed, including ones on behalf of Bonnie Hubley and Randy Hubley, Sr., both of Toledo, and Gene Balliet, of Elmore. Mrs. Hubley died Dec. 19 at age 65. Her son died Jan. 15 at age 47.

Contact Erica Blake at: eblake@theblade.com or 419-213-2134.

Copyright 2011 The Blade. By using this service, you accept the terms of our [privacy statement](#) and our [visitor agreement](#).

Please read them.

The Toledo Blade Company, 541 N. Superior St., Toledo, OH 43660, (419) 724-6000

To contact a specific department or an individual person, [click here](#).

The Toledo Times ®