

# Mass. doctor accused of faking pain pill data

March 11 2009

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(AP) -- A Massachusetts anesthesiologist has been accused of faking data for a dozen years in 21 published studies that suggested after-surgery benefits from painkillers including Vioxx and Celebrex.

Dr. Scott Reuben, who is on leave from Springfield's [Baystate Medical Center](#), studied the use of several drugs to relieve pain and speed recovery after surgery.

The hospital said a routine review in May found that some of Reuben's research was not approved by an internal hospital review board. Further investigation found 21 papers published in anesthesiology journals between 1996 and 2008 in which Reuben made up some or all data. Hospital officials said Reuben did not admit to the fabrications. The doctor couldn't be reached for comment.

"Dr. Reuben deeply regrets that this happened," said his attorney, Ingrid Martin. "Dr. Reuben cooperated fully with the peer review committee. There were extenuating circumstances that the committee fairly and justly considered."

The hospital asked the journals to retract the studies, some of which reported favorable results from painkillers including [Pfizer Inc.'s Bextra](#), [Celebrex](#) and [Lyrica](#) and [Merck & Co. Inc.'s Vioxx](#). His studies also claimed Wyeth's antidepressant Effexor could be used as a painkiller.

Vioxx and Bextra - among a class of painkillers known as Cox-2 inhibitors - were pulled from the market amid mounting evidence they

raised the risk of heart attack, stroke and death. Celebrex is the only Cox-2 inhibitor still on the market. Lyrica is a treatment for fibromyalgia.

Pfizer gave Reuben five research grants between 2002 and 2007. He also was a member of the company's speakers bureau, giving talks about Pfizer drugs to colleagues.

Pfizer said in a statement it was "not involved in the conduct of any of these independent studies or in the interpretation or publication of the study results."

The investigation was first reported by the trade publication, Anesthesiology News.

The journal Anesthesia & Analgesia retracted 10 of Reuben's studies last month. The journal Anesthesiology said it retracted three.

"Doctors have been using (his) findings very widely," said Dr. Steven Shafer, editor of Anesthesia and Analgesia. "His findings had a huge impact on the field."

Shafer said researchers would re-examine the literature and may be forced to repeat clinical trials.

A Chicago doctor said Reuben's research had made him feel more comfortable using some of the painkillers in certain patients after surgery but that he would be less likely to do so now.

Dr. Honorio Benzon said the drugs helped relieve pain so that smaller doses of powerful and potentially addictive morphine-related drugs were needed.

Specifically, Celebrex and its relatives have been shown in some studies to interfere with bone healing - but not in Reuben's research. Because of that, Benzon said he, and probably other doctors, too, began using those drugs more often in patients having bone-related operations including spinal surgery.

Benzon said he didn't know if any of his patients treated with those drugs developed bone-healing problems, but that he will be very reluctant to use these drugs in bone surgery patients "until some better studies" are done.

Benzon, the chief of pain medicine at Chicago's Northwestern Memorial Hospital, called the revelations about Reuben's research "very disappointing. We're talking about 12 to 13 years that this has been going on with over 20 publications."

In an editorial in *Anesthesiology's* April edition, editor-in-chief Dr. James Eisenach calls for new research "re-examining the questions that seemed to be answered by Reuben."

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Citation: Mass. doctor accused of faking pain pill data (2009, March 11) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-03-mass-doctor-accused-faking-pain.html>

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