

Patient privacy focus of Amgen suit

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Two former employees with the California biotech company Amgen Inc. allege the company persuaded sales people to access patient records to boost sales.

The employees allege Amgen officials persuaded them to access patient records and sometimes pose of medical office personnel to influence the prescription of the arthritis and psoriasis drug Enbrel, the Los Angeles Times reported Wednesday.

Federal law prohibits unauthorized access to patient's medical information. Drug companies are also prohibited from marketing off-label uses, though doctors may prescribe drugs for any reason.

A former FDA lawyer said off-label marketing "is if you have a drug for colon cancer that you promote for brain cancer" while another advocate said Amgen violated FDA regulations by persuading patients to seek the Enbrel for milder forms of the diseases it was approved treat.

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