

The Makers of COVID-19 Vaccines: Pfizer

Since the year 2000, Pfizer has been charged 74 times with criminal and civil violations and paid a total of \$4,660,896,333 in fines. The top offenses to which the company plead guilty are unapproved marketing of products, bribery, making false claims, safety violations, environmental violations, racketeering, and violations of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.[1]

In spite of a very long list of criminal convictions, Pfizer and BioNTech were given an emergency use authorization for a COVID-19 vaccine on December 1, 2020.

Here are just a few of the episodes in which Pfizer and its subsidiaries have been found guilty of egregious acts:

In 2001, thirty Nigerian families sued Pfizer, claiming that the company conducted an unauthorized clinical trial of an untested antibiotic on their children without their consent in 1996 during a meningitis epidemic. Eleven children died as a result, and others had brain damage or became partially paralyzed or deaf.[2] In 2009 the company reached an out-of-court settlement with the Kenyan government for \$75 million dollars, and in August 2011 the company paid \$175,000 to each family to settle the claims. [3]

In 2004, Pfizer's Warner-Lambert subsidiary paid \$430 million to settle criminal and civil charges that it paid doctors to prescribe Neurontin, an epilepsy drug, for conditions for which it was never approved.[4] In 2008 it was discovered that Pfizer suppressed research showing that Neurontin did not work for these conditions and that the company routinely spun negative data about the drug to place it a more positive light. Additionally, the company combined negative studies with positive studies to neutralize negative findings and hide the fact that Neurontin did not work for unapproved uses.[5] A judge ordered the company to pay \$142 million to settle racketeering charges.[6]

In 2005, Pfizer agreed to stop advertising Celebrex on television and subsequently admitted that a 1999 clinical trial showed that Celebrex increased the risk of heart disease in elderly patients.[7]

Pfizer and its subsidiary company Pharmacia and Upjohn can boast that in 2009 it paid the largest criminal fine ever in the history of the U.S. (at that time) for any matter - \$1.195 billion dollars. The reason for the fine – the company's reps were marketing Bextra, a pain reliever, for uses and doses specifically prohibited by the FDA. Additionally, the company was forced to forfeit \$105 million which brought the total settlement of criminal charges to \$1.3 billion.

In addition, Pfizer agreed to pay \$1 billion more to resolve charges brought under the False Claims Act that the company illegally promoted four drugs – Bextra, Geodon (an anti-psychotic), Zyvox (an antibiotic) and Lyrica (an anti-epileptic drug) for off-label uses. The company was also found to have bribed doctors, paying kickbacks as incentives to prescribe these and other drugs.[8]

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Subsequently, Bextra was withdrawn from the market after the FDA mandated a black box warning about cardiovascular and gastrointestinal side effects.[9] The company set aside \$894 million dollars to settle claims for both Bextra and Celebrex.[10]

One of Pfizer's biggest scandals involved defective heart valves sold through one of its subsidiaries that killed over 100 people. An investigation of this matter showed that the company deliberately misled regulators while seeking approval for the product. The company agreed to stop making the valves, but they had already been implanted in tens of thousands of people who were now at risk.[11] In 1994, the company paid \$10.75 million to settle charges brought by the Justice Department that it lied to regulators about risks associated with these valves.

In 2012 the company settled charges related to a multi-million-dollar bribery scheme involving payments to government officials, health regulators, doctors, and hospital administrators in Bulgaria, Croatia, Kazakhstan and Russia. Pfizer used sham consulting contracts, exclusive distributorships and improper travel and cash payments in order to gain market share, and earned over \$7 million in profits as a result of its illegal behavior. The fine – only \$15 million.[12]

During one 3-year period, Pfizer Italy provided free cell phones, copy machines, printers and televisions to doctors; gave them paid vacations with companions; and made direct cash payments to doctors which were falsely categorized as speaker fees and professional training. The company paid a fine of \$60.2 million which represents about one half of one percent of the company's annual profits. [13]

And this is the problem. For Pfizer and other drug companies, paying billions of dollars in criminal and civil fines for misrepresentation and hurting and killing people is just a cost of doing business. Employees of Pfizer and its subsidiaries are not indicted and prosecuted, so there really is no reason for the company's management to stop doing these things.

Would you purchase any product made by this company? I wouldn't – not even mouth wash. Why? Because Pfizer could not even play it straight with a product like this. The company paid \$70,000 in fines to 10 states to settle charges concerning misleading advertising for a mouth rinse called Plax in 1991.[14]

What on earth would possess regulators to allow a company like this to continue to do business in the United States? Or to grant an Emergency Use Authorization to a Pfizer vaccine? Regulators would not allow it, but business partners, of course, would. And it is abundantly clear that U.S. government agencies like the FDA and CDC are not regulators, but rather business partners for drug and vaccine makers.

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