

New Vioxx Study Favors, Well, It Depends Who You Ask

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Posted by Peter Lattman
Wall Street Journal
Friday, May 12, 2006

As the Law Blog has seen from the reaction to earlier posts, Vioxx studies are subject to varying interpretations. And yet again, Merck announced results of a study yesterday that seems to indicate, well, it depends on who you ask.

Merck says the study supplies a defense against patients who blame Vioxx for heart attacks or strokes suffered after they stopped taking the drug. The data showed that patients who stopped taking the painkiller for one year after taking it in an earlier trial had no greater risk of heart attacks and strokes than patients who took placebos during the same study. Merck said the heart risk in the one-year period after taking the drug was not statistically insignificant. General Counsel Kenneth Frazier said, "We believe the data does not provide a valid basis for claims after patients stopped taking the medicine."

But The Wall Street Journal's lead suggests otherwise: "Merck & Co. released new data from a critical Vioxx study that suggests patients remained at risk of a heart attack or stroke during the first year after they stopped taking the painkiller." The chief of cardiovascular medicine at the Cleveland Clinic told the WSJ, "The big picture is that the hazard stays the same."

Plaintiffs' lawyer Thomas Kline also told the WSJ that the data works in their favor: "The important fact is that the cumulative scientific evidence established that the risk is there."

Here are stories from Reuters, the WSJ, and the Financial Times. Also, though we can't find Merck's release on the study, we did find this special information center on its Web Site for all you Vioxx-trial junkies.