

New York State Psychiatric Association, Inc.
Area II Council of the American Psychiatric Association
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Barry B. Perlman, M.D., President of the New York State Psychiatric Association, issued the following statement in response to an announcement by Eliot Spitzer, Attorney General of the State of New York, of the filing of a lawsuit against GlaxoSmithKline alleging that the company withheld from the public and the medical community important research data concerning the safety and efficacy of its antidepressant medication paroxetine HCL (sold under the name Paxil®) for the treatment of children and adolescents with depression.

The New York State Psychiatric Association is the statewide medical specialty organization representing over 4,300 psychiatrists in New York and the New York State affiliate of the American Psychiatric Association, a national medical specialty organization with over 35,000 members.

Dr. Perlman stated:

"I am the Director of Psychiatry at St. Joseph's Medical Center in Yonkers, New York. Today, I am speaking as President of the New York State Psychiatric Association, the medical professional society representing over 4,300 psychiatrists in this state.

As physicians, our profession embraces the principle that the relationship between a doctor and a patient must be based upon a sense of trust. In order to hold true to that principle, physicians must have access to all relevant medical information regarding treatment including various medications that we discuss with and recommend for our patients. Any obstacle placed in the way of full and complete communication with our patients undermines the trust upon which the doctor-patient relationship is based and prevents us from providing the best care we can to our patients.

It was to preserve that relation that our profession fought against "gag" rules imposed by the managed care industry forbidding physicians from advising patients of all of their treatment options. It is for the same reason that we today support government action to assure full access to research findings which may provide vital information about medications our patients need. While we express no opinion regarding the merits of the Attorney General's lawsuit, any unnecessary restriction or limitation on physicians' access to relevant clinical data raises the possibility that patients will not receive proper treatment or, worse, that patients may be harmed.

The need for full disclosure of relevant clinical data is most important in those cases where a medication is utilized for purposes other than those for which it has been approved by the FDA. These so-called "off label" uses are common and vital to our ability to offer efficacious treatment. It is especially so in the case of the treatment of many illnesses including mental illness which occur in children since most pharmacological research submitted for approval to the FDA is based on research using adults. Although the present lawsuit concerns itself with the treatment of children with an antidepressant medication, the principle at stake involves all areas of medical practice.

The general public and the medical community should not have to fear that clinical findings of significance regarding a medication may be suppressed and remain unavailable to their physicians because the findings may be deemed unfavorable to the financial interests of the manufacturer.

Therefore, NYSPA supports all efforts to insure the complete and full disclosure of all relevant data regarding all medications offered to the public. Such efforts can only help improve the sense of trust and confidence necessary for the provision of quality health care.

One final note -the New York State Psychiatric Association is concerned that the publicity surrounding this lawsuit may discourage parents from seeking treatment for their children - especially children who may be suffering from symptoms of depression or another mental illness. The good news is that there is effective treatment for psychiatric disorders for both children and adults. It would be tragic if concerns about the alleged improper suppression of clinical data by drug manufacturers resulted in parents becoming reluctant to seek professional help for their children. The greatest risk is that adults and children with depression and other psychiatric illnesses might be left untreated.