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INQUIRY

Prozac's critics hurt mentally ill

Prozac, a commonly prescribed antidepressant drug made by Eli Lilly and Co., has been under attack from the Church of Scientology and lawyers who have developed the so-called "Prozac defense" — blaming the drug for their clients' behavior. They and some former users charge that the drug causes bizarre mental side effects and can lead to suicide.

Mitchell Daniels, Eli Lilly's vice president for corporate affairs, defended the drug and attacked the attackers Monday in a meeting with USA TODAY's editorial board.

Here are excerpts from that meeting:

Q: Some people say Prozac is dangerous. Why?

A: The source of virtually everything you've heard about Prozac has come from the Scientologists, with a boost from trial lawyers whose self-interest is obvious. One thing we want you to understand is that the Church of Scientology is no church. It's a commercial enterprise. Every judge and every investigative journalist who has ever looked at it has come away with that conclusion. It is organized for only one purpose, which is to make money.

Q: But why would they single out Prozac for attack if it's not dangerous?

A: Before Prozac they attacked other psychotropic medicines. They have attacked psychiatry generally. Any vulnerable patient saved by psychiatry or therapy of any kind is one less po-

tential victim for them.

Q: What evidence says Prozac is safe?

A: It's the most studied drug in the history of brain disease. Two thousand scientific papers. Almost two decades of medical research worldwide. There are 45 or 50 regulatory bodies which have all concluded that it's a safe and effective drug.

Q: Have there been successful lawsuits against Prozac?

A: Zero. And no successful uses of the so-called Prozac defense.

Q: What evidence is there that it works?

A: Clinical trials have proved it is effective in, we believe, two-thirds, 70%, something like that, cases of clinical depression.

Q: How many people have used it?

A: Three to three and a half million. There's a massive database now. And I should add also that everything that has been alleged with regard to Prozac happens in the same frequency or more, much more, in the untreated patient and with the other treatments. It is simply a part of the disease and not the drug.

Q: What's wrong with raising questions about it?

A: The issue here is the restigmatization of mental health and the alarm and the scaring of patients away from seeking treatment.

Q: Has the criticism affected sales?

A: Prozac is still the best-selling antidepressant and sales are up some, but the market share is off appreciably, as the world knows.



H. Darr Beiser
Daniels