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Editor's note: This English translation was done by a third party. The original print report can be accessed here.

Anti-baldness medication with serious side effects: ten men are suing the laboratory

By Mélanie Gomez

Propecia, the anti-hair loss medication, is still being sold in France and the European Union, but now 10 victims are suing the company that markets it, according to information gathered by Europe 1. The MSD Laboratory and French health authorities delayed in informing patients and their doctors of undesirable side effects, notably that they may be irreversible. The victims claim that Propecia, an anti-baldness medication containing finasteride, causes loss of libido, erectile difficulties and suicidal ideation. So many side effects, often irreversible, of which patients were poorly – or not at all – informed. This is why the 10 men have begun legal action against MSD, for failing to provide sufficient information.

The medication was initially used to treat enlarged prostate

Despite many adverse effects, Propecia is still available on the market. Because before it was prescribed to fight hair loss in men, it was prescribed to treat enlarged prostate. It was only authorized to treat baldness in 1999.

A positive risk/benefit relationship, according to the European Union

Finasteride is a treatment authorized for the European market. It is therefore at the European – not only French – level that its risk/benefit relationship is established annually. Currently, the European Union considers this relationship is still favorable, for the treatment of both enlarged prostate and hair loss. According to its experts, side effects are rare. And yet, its victims claim that 20 percent of all finasteride patients are negatively impacted. Apparently, many men are not aware that their current medical problems can be linked directly to this medication. The MSD Laboratory and relevant health authorities delayed in informing patients and doctors of the adverse side effects, notably that they may be irreversible.

A more complete French product insert

Nonetheless, in France in 2012, the National Agency for the Safety of Medication (ANSM) published a warning about possible sexual problems, and again in 2017. But this time they have also added the risk of psychiatric problems, with an advisory saying that patients should stop all treatment if they experience symptoms. Finally, in February of this year, a letter was sent to all prescribing physicians.

'The lab and health authorities delayed in informing patients and doctors'

For the attorney representing the victims, these actions are not enough. He is preparing to bring suit against MSD, and the first hearing will take place in April at the court in Nanterre, in the Hauts-de-Seine department. Me Charles Joseph-Oudin will claim that patients were poorly or not informed at all.

“Our position is that the MSD Lab and health authorities delayed in informing patients as well as their doctors of the adverse side effects and their possible irreversibility,” he explained on a Europe 1 broadcast. “And this is what we’ll show the judge. This should be ample grounds for compensation.”

Joseph-Oudin will be presenting the cases of the 10 victims to the judge. He says he has another 70 case still being processed. He is convinced that other cases will be added soon, to denounce a medication that is still being prescribed annually to about 30,000 men in France.