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Veterans PTSD Families Question Seroquel, Settlement Announced

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Washington, DC: **Veterans PTSD**, or post-traumatic stress disorder, is a fact of post-tour life for scores of veterans young and old alike. Now, a medication that has been increasingly prescribed to returning soldiers and post-traumatic stress disorder veterans is the subject of settlement news, a warning from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and some controversy.

Seroquel, the potent antipsychotic manufactured by AstraZeneca, has enjoyed an increasing presence in the medicine cabinets of veterans over the past nine years to help them deal with the after-effects of PTSD—namely insomnia, nightmares and constant restlessness. Seroquel is the fifth best-selling drug in the US, in part thanks to the US department of Veteran's Affairs: Seroquel is one of the VA's top expenditures. The *Associated Press (AP)* reported that military medical system spending on Seroquel has increased sevenfold since the start of the war in Afghanistan.



However, there are side effects to Seroquel. And last year, according to the 8/30/10 edition of the *Boston Globe*, researchers at Vanderbilt University came out with a study that suggested a risk for heart failure.

A young Army corporal named Andrew White had been prescribed more than double the maximum dose of Seroquel recommended for patients suffering from schizophrenia. White returned home from a nine-month tour in Iraq suffering from outward signs of PTSD, including nightmares that standard doses of Seroquel were unable to stem. So, according to the *Boston Globe*, his doctors upped his dose to 1600 milligrams a day.

An investigation by the Department of Veteran's Affairs determined that the Seroquel in White's body was part of a chemical cocktail that included an antidepressant and an anti-anxiety pill. There was also a painkiller for which he did not have a prescription.

White, 23, died in his sleep a short time after his Seroquel dose was maxed out.

The *Boston Globe* reveals that some military families have taken the view that the government is not being up front with regard to the risks of Seroquel and are asking Congress to look into the matter.

Meanwhile, earlier this summer the FDA issued a communiqué to Seroquel manufacturer AstraZeneca, warning that the manufacturer had allegedly circulated "misleading" information to doctors, overstating efficacy and allowing for the omission of material facts and risks associated with Seroquel.

And in the same month that AstraZeneca announced that it had settled thousands of Seroquel lawsuits at a cost of \$198 million to the company, the UK-based Pharmaceutical Medicines Code of Practice Authority was forced to dismiss, for lack of evidence, a separate claim that AstraZeneca had promoted Seroquel for borderline personality disorder, a use for which the drug was not approved by regulators.

Even though the claim was dismissed, the *Financial Times* reported in August that the authority found the situation to be "wholly unacceptable," pointing to the fact that the company was not able to produce more information on a meeting it had sponsored.

The \$198 million Seroquel settlement is spread out over 17,500 plaintiffs and represents about 66 percent of Seroquel claims, the *Financial Times* reports. Of those claims, it is not known how many are tied to veterans disability or combat PTSD. It is also not known if the estate of the late Andrew White is among them.

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