

The Philadelphia Inquirer philly.com

Friday, April 28, 2017

Philadelphia Media Network

Philadelphia jury awards \$20M to Cinnaminson woman in pelvic-mesh trial

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A Philadelphia Common Pleas Court jury has awarded \$20 million to a Cinnaminson woman who charged that a vaginal-mesh product made by Johnson & Johnson failed to work as advertised, caused her chronic pain, and necessitated multiple corrective surgeries.

The award Friday — which included \$17.5 million in punitive damages — followed a three-week trial in which the victim's lawyers argued not only that the mesh was defective, but that Johnson & Johnson and its subsidiary Ethicon had concealed the risks of the product even as they were marketing it.

Peggy Engleman, 56, was implanted with the device in 2007 to relieve urinary incontinence. But within a month of surgery, the mesh failed and Engleman's problems returned. Her lawyers said she began to experience pain and discomfort when the mesh started to erode inside her body.

Although she has had multiple surgeries as a result, her physicians have been unable to remove all of the shards of mesh that remain in her abdomen, a common complaint about the device.

"I am happy I could be a voice for other women," Engleman said. "It's been a nightmare, and I feel justice was truly served today."

In a statement late Friday, Ethicon said, "We believe the evidence showed Ethicon's TVT-Secur device was properly designed, Ethicon acted appropriately and responsibly in the research, development and marketing of the product, and TVT-Secur was not the cause of the plaintiff's continuing medical problems. Therefore, we are disappointed with today's verdict and feel we have strong grounds for appeal."

The mesh product used to treat Engleman was launched in September 2006, but by then J&J had already had multiple complaints about it.

Pelvic-mesh implants came into wide use a decade ago for treatment of a condition in which the bladder and other abdominal organs, weakened by

childbirth, sag over time, causing incontinence and other problems. Mesh implants, however, appear to cause problems of their own, degrading over time so that pieces of the original implant break off inside the body and pierce organs internally.

Johnson & Johnson faces tens of thousands of additional lawsuits in courts around the country, filed by women who allege that they were harmed by the company's vaginal-mesh devices.

"The jury spoke, and they sent a message that J&J and Ethicon need to take responsibility," said attorney Chris Gomez of Philadelphia-based Kline & Specter, one of the law firms representing Engleman.

Two earlier pelvic-mesh verdicts in Philadelphia against Johnson & Johnson, in 2015 and 2016, resulted in awards of \$12.5 million and \$13.5 million.