Tyson Found Guilty of Rape, Two Other Charges

By Malcolm Gladwell
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Dow Corning Papers Show Fears of Implant Problems

Dow Corning Corp. on Monday released internal memos, letters, and documents that revealed a history of warnings that the company's silicone breast implant product required further study under certain circumstances and that the silicone gel inside the implant could cause thinning of the outer shell of the prosthesis in the patient.

The company also announced Monday that it was replacing its chairman, John S. Ludington. He will be succeeded by Keith R. Seeburger, a spokesman for the company. "McKinsson has broad executive management experience in public policy and government affairs... His background in consulting is a meaningful resolution of the problems we are facing."

The company made the 800-page package, which included 27 scientific studies and numerous internal company documents spanning 25 years, available to the public in the form of the Food and Drug Administration.

Among the contents was a 1987 letter that a Los Angeles plastic surgeon wrote to Dow Corning concerning a breast implant from a patient, the silicone gel in which had "thinned with the consistency of 50 weight motor oil."

In an internal company memo, dated 1986, a salesman complained that Dow Corning's decision to put "a questionable" lot of silicone-silicone "mammaries" on the market "has to rank right up there with the Pinto gas tank.

In a 1978 memo, a company doctor wrote to Dow Corning concerning the potential for "a large part of the implant market."

Federal health officials want to find out whether or not autoimmune diseases show up in those women. Dow Corning is now conducting a major epidemiological study of that question in Michigan.

One issue is rupture. Implants consist of an outer shell filled with liquid silicone gel. Health officials say the damage, which can leak out. This happens most often during the operation to insert the implant, unless the surgeon accidentally punctures it or lacerates it when he is trying to place it into the breast.

Another concern is whether or not some amount of gel can "feed" through the implant shell into the body.

FDA officials said that after reading the internal company documents in January, they became convinced that they did not have an adequate idea how often and under what circumstances rupture and leakage occurs. They were also alarmed, they said, by the fact that women who had their breast implants removed were shared by people within Dow Corning itself.

For example: In a 1979 memo, Dow Corning engineer Tom Talcott wrote of his "only disappointment at a symposium for plastic surgeons that plastic surgeons never ended up in those women. Dow Corning is now conducting a major epidemiological study of that question in Michigan."

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