

Johnson & Johnson Co Inc

Johnson & Johnson unit speaks out at planned death row drug use

Group says it does not condone use of its drugs in lethal injection as Florida eyes move



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2 HOURS AGO by: David Crow in New York

Johnson & Johnson, the world's largest healthcare company, has hit out at plans by the US state of Florida to execute a prisoner on death row using an experimental lethal injection containing a drug it invented.

Janssen, a division of J&J, discovered etomidate in the 1960s but no longer makes the off-patent medicine, which is manufactured by several drugmakers.

“We do not condone the use of our medicines in lethal injections for capital punishment,” Janssen said in a statement.

It added: “Janssen discovers and develops medical innovations to save and enhance lives. We do not support the use of our medicines for indications that have not been approved by regulatory authorities, such as the US [Food and Drug Administration].”

It is the first time that a drug connected to J&J has been used in a lethal injection and, as such, the company has not spoken out on the topic before.

Florida has not disclosed which company made its supplies of etomidate, an injectable sedative used to anaesthetise patients, which is manufactured by several companies including Pfizer and Mylan, according to a government database of prescription drugs.

J&J’s condemnation follows several similar interventions by drugmakers such as Pfizer, Roche and Baxter.

Most drugmakers are vehemently opposed to the use of their products in lethal injections and many have [responded](#) to anti-death penalty campaigners by introducing controls to stop correctional facilities stockpiling their medicines for executions.

The industry’s opposition to capital punishment — which it sees as anathema to its mission of saving lives — has frustrated states that still have the death penalty.

Many such states have been unable to secure supplies of drugs and have been forced to turn to unproven experimental cocktails or, in the case of Utah, reintroduce the firing squad.

“The world’s largest drug manufacturer has added its voice to the industry-wide consensus that opposes the misuse of medical products in lethal injection execution,” said Maya Foa, director of Reprieve, a charity that describes itself as an “international rights organisation”.

Ms Foa added: “Pharmaceutical companies are clear that their drugs are for saving the lives of patients, not ending the lives of prisoners. In Florida particularly, governor [Rick] Scott should listen to clear and unequivocal statements from J&J and others calling time on this dangerous misuse of medicines.”

It is not clear how Florida circumvented the controls put in place by drugmakers to stop

correctional facilities from buying their medicines, although it could have amassed supplies of etomidate before it publicly announced its intention to use it in a lethal injection earlier this year.

Florida plans to use etomidate as the first of three drugs in the lethal injection, which also includes rocuronium bromide, a muscle relaxer to prevent jerking, and potassium acetate, which stops the heart when administered in high enough doses.

The state is also substituting potassium acetate for potassium chloride, which is more commonly used but harder to secure because of the supply controls.

Potassium acetate has been used in a lethal injection only once before in 2015 in Oklahoma — but only by mistake. In that highly publicised execution, the prisoner said he felt like his body was “on fire” before he died.

After defeating several legal challenges, Florida scheduled the execution of double murderer Mark James Asay for this Thursday.

A spokesperson for Florida attorney-general Pam Bondi did not respond to a request for comment.

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