1	UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT		
2	EASTERN DISTRICT OF LOUISIANA ***********************************		
3		1657	
4	4 LIABILITY LITIGATION Section	n: "L"	
5		leans, Louisiana , June 16, 2006	
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8	TRANSCRIPT OF MONTHLY STATUS CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS HEARD BEFORE THE HONORABLE ELDON E. FALLON		
9	UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE		
10			
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25	Proceedings recorded by mechanical stenography, transcript produced by computer.		

1	<u>PROCEEDINGS</u>		
2	(FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 2006)		
3	(MONTHLY STATUS CONFERENCE)		
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5	THE COURT: Be seated, plea se. Good morning, ladies		
6	and gentlemen. Let's call the case.		
7	THE DEPUTY CLERK: MDL No. 1657, in re: Vioxx.		
8	THE COURT: Counsel make their appearance for the record.		
9	MR. WITTMANN: Good morning, your Honor, Phil Wittmann,		
10	Defense Liaison Counsel.		
11	MR. LEVIN: Arnold Levin, sir, substituting for Russ		
12	Herman who is plaintiff's liaison counsel.		
13	THE COURT: All right. I met with the liaison counsel to		
14	discuss the Joint Report No. 15 with them. I will take them in		
15	order.		
16	The Lexis/Nexis File & Serve. I noticed we are still		
17	having some difficulty in file and serve. I understand that the		
18	problem is really with communication with the attorneys. We've got		
19	to do something about that because it's important that the		
20	information be properly placed in the file and serve mode so that		
21	the parties have access to it. Any suggestions on how we go about		
22	that?		
23	MR. WITTMANN: Well, two suggestions, your Honor. First		
24	of all, in cases that are either newly filed in the MDL or		
25	transferred down by the Judicial Panel of Multi District Litigation		

it's important for counsel of those cases to register with Lexis/Nexis FILE and serve in accordance with Pretrial Order 8 as soon as they get the cases transferred down here. We've got a situation where plaintiff's counsel in newly filed or transferred cases are waiting for months before they register on Lexis/Nexis and that makes it impossible to deal with them on that system.

The second point is that counsel have to remember that filings that are being uploaded to file and serve should be uploaded to the individual specific case and not to the master MDL case, except in those instances where the pleadings specifically states that it applies to all cases. Especially in light of the new e-mail filing requirements here in the Eastern District, which mandate that filings be electronically filed solely in the master MDL case. The staff at Lexis/Nexis is concerned that counsel will upload to serve a pleading incorrectly and mistakenly upload case specific findings on the MDL which will drastically slow down the Lexis/Nexis system.

THE COURT: How do we go about getting that word out?

MR. WITTMANN: I think maybe if we sent a special

directive from the court to all counsel, plaintiffs counsel and

defense counsel, we can draft and submit it to you, your Honor, and
that would go out to all counsel in the MDL cases, that might help

alleviate the problem.

THE COURT: Let's do that. And also give me something that I can post on my web site so that one of the first things they see is this. In cases like this notice and information really, we

have to be able to control it and package it in some usable form,
and failure to do this will just cause problems along the way. It
slows everything down so we've got to get that taken care of.

MR. WITTMANN: I will get with Mr. Davis or more accurately get Ms. Wimberly to get with Mr. Davis and we will straighten this out.

THE COURT: Good. The next item is the State Court Trial Settings, I notice there are more as time goes on.

MR. WITTMANN: I think it's accurately set forth, your Honor, in the joint report. I have no changes to it.

THE COURT: Selection of Cases for Early Federal Trial. I have set cases in July, September, October, and November. So we are proceeding in those matters.

MR. LEVIN: That seems to be accurate, your Honor.

THE COURT: Class Actions is the fourth item.

MR. LEVIN: Your Honor, you have several motions and several class action issues. On the master complaint and the report on local 68 third party payer action is the matter has been fully briefed in the Supreme Court of New Jersey on the class action issue and there is a hearing set in Atlantic City, New Jersey before Judge Higbee I believe on July 13th on the proposed notice. And I also believe that there will be depositions in connection with the notice issues taken prior to that particular conference. Is that right?

THE COURT: What's the situation with the Supreme Court, do you all have a date?

MR. BEISNER: Your Honor, I could clarify on that what has been briefed to the court --

THE COURT: Tell me your name, please.

MR. BEISNER: I'm sorry, John Beisner, counsel for Merck. What's been briefed, your Honor, is a motion to the New Jersey Supreme Court to accept the appeal, that briefing is there. There is no, the court has not ruled on that.

MR. LEVIN: They're equivalent of certiorari.

MR. BEISNER: Right.

THE COURT: Discovery Directed to Merck. I had met with a representative from Merck to discuss the privilege log and discuss the material consistent with the ruling of the Fifth Circuit. I met in camera and I put everything on the record and sealed the record. It's really not substantive suggestions as much as just procedural on that as to how the material has been repackaged so that I can deal with it a little more easily.

Discovery Directed to the FDA. I notice that I ordered Dr. Graham to give his deposition. He gave his deposition. There is an issue as to cross-examination, whether it's in or out of the scope of the deposition. The plaintiffs take the position that it's outside of the scope of the direct examination, the defendants take the position that it's not outside of the scope; and to the extent it is, that it is more credibility impeachment of the witness, I have that before me and I will hear it.

MR. WITTMANN: Your Honor, could I suggest a change on

that from what appears in the joint status report? 1 2 THE COURT: Yes. MR. WITTMANN: It's set for hearing now on June 29th at 3 4 10:30. The parties have now agreed that the Avron deposition is 5 going to go forward on the 29th and 30th. If we could possibly move 6 that argument on the Graham matter to the 28th when we have other 7 matters that we are going to be arguing anyway. MR. LEVIN: May I confer with the arguers? 8 9 THE COURT: Sure. MR. LEVIN: Our designated hitter on that issue is Russ 10 11 Herman and he is at depositions on June 28th, and specifically it was set for June 29th to make that date available for Russ. 12 13 THE COURT: Phil, get with Russ on that and work it out. 14 I can deal with it whenever. 15 MR. WITTMANN: Okay. 16 THE COURT: Discovery Directed to Third Parties. I believe, your Honor, you have the documents 17 MR. LEVIN: and you're looking at them, as well as looking at other documents. 18 19 I know your Honor understands our position is there is no privilege 2.0 anyway. 21 I have briefs from the parties and I am THE COURT: Yes. 22 looking at the material. 23 Deposition Scheduling, do we have any issues on that? 24 MR. WITTMANN: Well, we had one with Dr. Avron, but that's

now been worked out, it's going forward on the 29th and the 30th.

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believe that we are going to schedule the issues that are pending on the deposition schedule for argument on Monday afternoon, your Honor.

 $$\operatorname{MR}.$ LEVIN: There are issues that need to be dealt with on Monday, sir.

THE COURT: Okay. And we have a conference on Monday --

MR. WITTMANN: Two o'clock.

THE COURT: -- two o'clock to allow the parties to argue those respective matters.

The Plaintiff Profile Forms. We are having some difficulty with the plaintiff profile form. For the record standpoint, why don't you define that. Ben, do you want some input on this?

MR. BENNETT: Good morning, Ben Bennett on behalf of Merck. As the court's aware, we've been discussing for the better part of six months trying to make some modifications to the Merck profile form, that were necessitated by the fact that the form as ordered was not aligned to the Merck IS systems.

We have been discussing those changes with the PLC as well as members from the PSC, but at this point in time it's dragged on for such a period of time that I think we need to bring it to some sort of conclusion. The efforts now lasted twice as long as the original negotiations of the MPF.

We have had discussions with Mr. Davis and Mr. Buchanan. We are planning to meet directly after this conference, and the

discussion would be if we can't work out an agreement then, we submit, almost immediately, submissions to the court and ask you to resolve the issues that we can't work out ourselves.

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THE COURT: I think we need to do that. One aspect of this case that we've tried to streamline is to modify the traditional mode of discovery; that is, preparing a number of interrogatories and then supplementing the interrogatories and then having another wave of interrogatories just takes too much time; and with this number of cases we have to find a way, a creative way of dealing with initial discovery. So the suggestion was to have plaintiff profile forms and Merck profile forms and by this procedure or mode they exchange some basic information, which ordinarily would be the substance of interrogatories. This method short circuits the interrogatory process and delivers that information.

But it has to be staggered, the plaintiffs provide the profile form, from that then the defendants provide profile forms, each delivering a rather detailed specific information, and we are breaking down on that and it's inhibiting the rest of the process so we have to get that moving.

So see what you can do, if you can agree upon it, fine; if you can't, then each side is going to have to give me what they want and then I will pick it.

MR. BUCHANAN: Thank you, your Honor. And in terms of where we are, just for the record, I believe the parties are in

virtual agreement on the MPF itself as revised. We have some debate and hopefully resolution can be reached today in terms of how it's implemented. I suspect that we will be able to agree on some things and we may have to come back to the court to discuss the manner in which compliance is implemented. But we don't want to hold up the completion of the form.

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THE COURT: I believe that's important, Dave. If you all agree on the form let's get that so that we don't have to redo what's already been done and move it along faster. And I understand there are issues with the other, but you need not hold those issues before you approve the form, that's not going to help me one way or the other and that's not going to persuade me one way or the other. So if you've got other issues, I will give you an opportunity to discuss those issues with the court. But the issues that you can agree on, let's get that over with.

MR. BUCHANAN: Your Honor, thank you.

THE COURT: State/Federal court, anything there?

MS. BARRIOS: Thank you, your Honor. Dawn Barrios for the State Liaison Committee. I have prepared, as usual, the remand orders. There is a lot of remand activity since our last status conference. The CD is totally cumulative, so you might want to throw all of the other CDs away.

I would like to offer with regard to the order that you will enter with Lexis/Nexis issues, that I have a database of e-mails of about 1,500 attorneys and that's how I communicate with

them. I would be more than happy to send that out for you as well once that's been decided upon.

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THE COURT: That's important, Dawn, and let's get in on this so that you can participate in the process so that you have that taken care of.

The remand motions are going to be a significant issue for me, meaning I am going to devote time and effort on the remand motions. What I would like to do, as I see it, and as I mentioned, is to proceed with these trials and see whether or not the parties after having an opportunity to look at the results of the federal trials as well as evaluate the results of state court trials can make an effort to determine whether they can look at this matter both state and federal globally and give each side an opportunity to look at it globally.

If I can't get that or it's not workable or no one is interested in it, then I have to deal with the remand motions.

One thing that continues to trouble me about MDL that I am working on, particularly in this case, is to avoid is the black hole concept. MDL is a great mechanism or vehicle for trying to organize the cases and not have the case consume the system, both state and federal. But the criticism that I hear throughout the country is it's sometimes a black hole, and that's not good for any party. You get transferred to the MDL if you're a plaintiff and you never hear from anybody anymore. And that's their side of it. The defendants the same way, the litigants are beginning to be concerned about

that, not necessarily in this case, but cases in general.

I am seeing articles and talking to people who are concerned about that, it gets transferred to the MDL and goes on and on and on and the litigation consumes the issues. And that's not the purpose of the MDL and it's not good for either side. So I don't want, and I make a conscience effort to avoid having it just be a black hole where things get lost and I try to have it as transparent as possible, and one of the ways is this meeting and the other way is the web site.

But we do have to move the cases. So I am conscience of the remands, I am not putting them on a shelf to just be forgotten.

I look at them every time I have an opportunity and I am going to be dealing with them at the appropriate time.

MS. BARRIOS: Thank you, your Honor.

THE COURT: Pro Se Claimants, anything?

MR. LEVIN: Seems to be nothing on that, your Honor.

THE COURT: Motion to Dismiss Foreign Class Actions. I have a number of foreign class actions that have been filed in this court, mostly from Italy and England, and these matters are for briefing, waiting for the Merck's reply brief on the 26th and then I will deal with them.

MR. WITTMANN: Actually, also, your Honor, there was a motion to amend the Italian and French class action and Merck opposed their motions and filed our opposition brief June 14th.

THE COURT: Okay. Generic Trial Performance and Rule 702

Motions in Limine.

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MR. WITTMANN: Judge, we have two matters that are going to be before you on Monday, that's the preservation deposition issues that we talked about a moment ago; and the second is the issue of whether the plaintiffs will be permitted to subpoena Dr. David Anstice down here for trial or take a deposition or have him appear on a movie screen during the trial.

THE COURT: Right.

MR. WITTMANN: That issue is going to be argued on Monday as well. But for those two, any other generic in limine motions are now set for June 28th at 9 A.M.

THE COURT: Anything further on that?

MR. WITTMANN: That hearing on Monday is going be telephonically as I understand it, unless your Honor wants liaison counsel here.

THE COURT: It doesn't matter. I will take it telephonically unless you all want to do it here; otherwise we will do it both, telephonically and otherwise, I will put you on this format if you need to be.

MR. WITTMANN: We have the dial-in number already.

THE COURT: Either way I don't have any problem.

MR. MARK: Douglas Mark, can we do that telephonically?

MR. LEVIN: Yes, we would prefer that also.

THE COURT: The IMS data is the next item on the agenda.

MR. WITTMANN: Your Honor, as the joint report indicates,

the IMS data has been provided to trial counsel in the cases that are coming up for trial in the MDL, so far as I know that production has come.

MR. BUCHANAN: I will just supplement that briefly. We received requests from certain of trial counsel for IMS data on the experts of the parties. That's been achieved in other litigations with IMS. If you recall IMS has asserted confidentiality protections over this. We're in meet/confer negotiations with IMS to try and resolve this for the litigation. We hope to reach the same exception to their general restriction to allow that information to be promptly provided to trial counsel, plaintiffs' trial counsel concerning the experts that are designated in the cases.

THE COURT: When can we get a decision on that?

MR. BUCHANAN: Your Honor, I reached out to them for the New Jersey litigation this week and promptly received their consent. I will reach out to them for the MDL today or Monday and will hopefully get that resolved.

THE COURT: Let me know by Wednesday. And if you don't have it, get me involved and I will work it out.

MR. BUCHANAN: Thank you.

THE COURT: Let them know that you need to report to me by Wednesday.

MR. BUCHANAN: I will, your Honor, thank you.

THE COURT: Discovery in Non-trial Cases.

MR. LEVIN: We've discussed this in chambers and we heard your Honor's suggestion, with a capital S, and we are going to confer with our PSC and attempt to come back with something that your Honor will find reasonable to deal with the subject matter in that particular item.

MR. WITTMANN: Meanwhile, your Honor, we are going to go forward with those six cases, those six stroke cases in discovery and work with Mr. Ranier and also with any other counsel that are actually involved in cases so that it won't inconvenience their schedule. We need to get forward and moving on this issue.

THE COURT: The issue in this matter, as the record indicates, I have set several cases for trial. But there are also a lot of other cases out there that are not set for trial. There are cases that are stroke cases, cases in which individuals claim Vioxx participated or caused or had some effect in producing or encouraging the stroke. That's about one third of the census of the litigation. We haven't had any discovery on those particular cases yet. None of the cases are set for trial.

The plaintiffs have taken the position that the medical is in the process of becoming in those particular cases and perhaps discovery is premature. I understand that argument from the standpoint of trial, but I think that both sides need to focus on the stroke cases, see what the claims are, flush out the claims, do the basic discovery on those particular cases.

The defendants have picked six cases that they want to

proceed on. Several of the cases involve attorneys who are presently engaged in trials that the court has set. The plaintiffs initially objected to any discovery on those cases. It seems to me that it's fair to have the cases proceed with at least some discovery with the understanding that the discovery be coordinated. I don't think it's fair to have somebody who is preparing a case for trial to be pulled away to discover some cases that are not set for trial.

But with that said, it seems to me that we need to move on those cases. So my suggestion with a capital S to the plaintiffs is that if they have concern about these six cases, they pick six cases that they feel are appropriate and timely and can be discovered and proceed with discovery in the cases. But meanwhile, let the six proceed with the understanding that you coordinate that with the attorneys who are busy in trial.

MR. LEVIN: Your Honor, the Plaintiff Steering Committee wants to thank the court for making out the record for their position on this particular matter.

THE COURT: The new items, I have noted with sadness

Ms. Carlene Rhodes Lewis' passing. She was a key part of this whole concept of the litigation and was present at the creation, so to speak, and she was an active participant in this litigation. I mention that in the order that I signed.

I've also supplemented the committee, placed a person in her place after consulting with counsel for all sides.

The next item on the agenda is ECF system, anything on that? Electronic case filing.

MR. WITTMANN: That's up and running, your Honor. And the clerk of court has issued a directive on how to use the system and is offering training sessions to lawyers to familiarize them with the system. And while it's not mandatory yet, I know your Honor is interested in encouraging people to use it.

THE COURT: I am. So if anybody needs any training for doing any of the filing in this particular case, please be aware that we will have training and tailer it for your needs. And if you have any questions we will get those answered immediately.

MR. LEVIN: Your Honor, may I introduce to the court Shelly Sanford who is our newest member on the PSC. It's unfortunate that she is our new member under the circumstances that she comes aboard, but we are very fortunate to have her because she's been fully committed to litigation from the start. She's been here in the back of the courtroom and you haven't seen her, but she has been important to us.

THE COURT: All right. Hi, Ms. Sanford, good to have you aboard and appreciate all of your work on this matter. I've been conscience of it, the parties have alerted me to it, and it's good to have you as a member of the committee.

MS. SANFORD: Thank you, your Honor. And on behalf of Carlene, thank you very much as well.

THE COURT: Okay. The final item is the Certificate of

Service for E-filings. Anything on that? There's a suggestion that 1 2 we put the certificate, I understand that that's agreed to by the 3 parties. 4

MR. LEVIN: Yes, sir.

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We are going to submit a proposed Pretrial MR. WITTMANN: Order 8B incorporating that and your Honor can sign that after approving it.

THE COURT: The next meeting in this matter will be on July 13th. I will be in trial on that day, so I would appreciate it if we could start earlier. I will have the committee meeting at 8 and start at 8:30.

MR. WITTMANN: 8:30?

THE COURT: Yes. Anything further from anyone? Anyone on the committee, anyone in the courtroom, any thought or suggestion?

MR. WITTMANN: Not from the defendant, your Honor.

MR. BECNEL: Judge, I just gave Mr. -- I think 50 some what cases I just filed. And I would like to get some of my Louisiana cases up for trial. I keep filing them.

THE COURT: I think that's fair.

MR. WITTMANN: I will note that this was not electronically filed, your Honor.

THE COURT: Okay. Let's get with Mr. Becnel and see about the cases and coordinate that with liaison counsel, too. I think that's a fair request, Mr. Becnel. Let's stay on that, please, so that I can deal with it.

1 MR. DAVIS: I just point out for the court, as we've asked 2 in the past, if you'll come through the Plaintiff Steering Committee we will assist in getting those cases and try to get those to the 3 defense. 4 5 THE COURT: Let's do that, but I do want, Mr. Becnel has 6 been diligent about requesting. The problem is we've had some 7 difficulty with communication and difficulty with preparation of the cases. But let's stick with that and continue to talk Mr. Becnel. 8 I don't mean to talk at this meeting, if you have a problem let's 9 10 get me on the phone with liaison and I will talk you through it. Thank you, your Honor. 11 MR. WITTMANN: MR. DUGAN: Hi, Judge, James Dugan. We were supposed to 12 13 have --14 THE COURT: Yes, I had a motion set. I've got the 15 briefing on the motion. I have several motions set on the 28th, and I thought it would be better if I could look at all of those motions 16 17 at the same time. 18 That would be fine, that would be great. MR. DUGAN: 19 THE COURT: I apologize if it inconvenienced you in any 20 way. No problem, not at all. Thank you, Judge. 21 MR. DUGAN: 22 THE COURT: Anything further? 23 MR. WITTMANN: No, sir. 24 THE COURT: Okay. The court will be in recess. 25 THE DEPUTY CLERK: Everyone rise.

1	(WHEREUPON, THE PROCEEDINGS WERE CONCLUDED.)		
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6	REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE		
7			
8	I, Karen A. Ibos, CCR, Official Court Reporter, United States		
9	District Court, Eastern District of Louisiana, do hereby certify		
10	that the foregoing is a true and correct transcript, to the best of		
11	my ability and understanding, from the record of the proceedings in		
12	the above-entitled and numbered matter.		
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16	Karen A. Ibos, CCR, RPR		
17	Official Court Reporter		
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