

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS**

ALFRED BRAME,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
vs.)	CIVIL NO. 05-034-GPM
)	
MERCK & COMPANY, INC., and)	
WALGREENS HOME CARE, INC.,)	
)	
Defendants.)	

MEMORANDUM AND ORDER

MURPHY, Chief District Judge:

Plaintiff filed this action on December 28, 2004, in state court seeking damages for personal injuries and economic losses suffered as a result of taking the prescription drug Vioxx, which was manufactured, marketed, distributed and/or sold by Defendants to the general public. On January 20, 2005, Merck & Company, Inc. (Merck), removed this action from state court based upon the diversity of citizenship statute, 28 U.S.C. § 1332, arguing that Walgreens Home Care, Inc., is fraudulently joined and, therefore, its Illinois citizenship should be disregarded. Plaintiff filed a motion to remand, in which he points out that before the case was removed, he filed an amended complaint to substitute the proper defendant Walgreen Company, d/b/a Walgreens, for the improperly named Walgreens Home Care, Inc. Both Walgreen Company and Walgreens Home Care, Inc., are Illinois citizens, and there is no substantive difference regarding the allegations made against them. Therefore, for purposes of this Memorandum and Order, the Court will refer to the Illinois corporate Defendant as "Walgreens."

In order for this Court to have diversity jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1332, the parties must be of diverse citizenship and the amount in controversy must exceed the sum or value of \$75,000, exclusive of interest and costs. The burden of proof falls on the party seeking to invoke federal diversity jurisdiction to present “competent proof” that the requirements of § 1332 have been met. *Chase v. Shop 'N Save Warehouse Foods, Inc.*, 110 F.3d 424, 427 (7th Cir. 1997); *see also McNutt v. General Motors Acceptance Corp.*, 298 U.S. 178, 179 (1936). In deciding whether a defendant has been fraudulently joined, a federal court “must engage in an act of prediction: is there any reasonable possibility that a state court would rule against the non-diverse defendant?” *Poulos v. Naas Foods, Inc.*, 959 F.2d 69, 73 (7th Cir. 1992). As recognized by the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals in *Poulos*, “[a]n out-of-state defendant who wants to remove must bear a heavy burden to establish fraudulent joinder.” *Id.*

Generally, Merck argues that Walgreens has been fraudulently joined because Plaintiff has not alleged a valid cause of action against this Defendant. Specifically, in its notice of removal, Merck summarily states that “Plaintiff alleges that ‘Walgreens sold [VIOXX] to plaintiff ... in the regular course of its business’ (Compl. ¶ 35) and that Walgreens should be liable for strict products liability, failure to warn, and breach of warranty. (Counts 3, 6, and 11). There is no reasonable basis for predicting that Plaintiff could prevail on her [sic] asserted claims against Walgreens. ... Accordingly, Walgreens is fraudulently joined.” (Doc. 1, ¶ 14 (string citation to cases denying remand omitted).)

Before filing his motion to remand, Plaintiff attempted to resolve this issue by drawing Merck’s attention to this Court’s order in a similar case, *Gallaher, et al. v. Bayer Corporation, et al.*, civil number 01-641-GPM, in which the undersigned decided that Walgreen Company was not

fraudulently joined in a case involving the prescription drug Baycol. The Court would also draw Merck's attention to its more recent decision in *Elliott v. Wyeth, Inc., et al.*, civil number 03-037-GPM, another case in which the undersigned decided that Walgreen Company was not fraudulently joined after carefully considering Illinois's so-called "innocent seller" statute and the "learned intermediary doctrine."

After carefully reviewing the papers filed in this case, the Court finds a response to the motion to remand unnecessary. Merck has failed to meet its burden in its notice of removal. The Court is not persuaded by conclusory allegations and citations to opinions that lack precedential value. Moreover, the Court will not allow a case over which it lacks jurisdiction to sit on its docket until a decision is reached by the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation, especially after the Court of Appeals' decision in *Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund v. CitiGroup, Inc.*, 391 F.3d 844, 851 (7th Cir. 2004) ("We find nothing absurd in district courts individually evaluating their own jurisdiction."). In light of this Court's previous rulings in nearly identical cases, to which Plaintiff alerted Merck, and Merck's utter failure in its notice of removal to satisfy its burden to establish federal jurisdiction, this is not a close case. Plaintiff's motion (Doc. 8) is **GRANTED**, and this action is **REMANDED** to the Twentieth Judicial Circuit Court, St. Clair County, Illinois, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1447(c) for lack of subject matter jurisdiction. Plaintiff's request for fees and costs is **granted**, and he shall file his application **on or before March 14, 2005**.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

DATED: 2/17/05

s/ G. Patrick Murphy
G. PATRICK MURPHY
Chief United States District Judge