

Date: Thu 05/03/2007

Section: A

Page: 8

Edition: 3 STAR

Teen's suicide held up as example

Her father urges others to heed new FDA warning on anti-depressants for young adults

By ANNE MARIE KILDAY
Staff

About six months after Kayla Beltran turned 18, her psychiatrist decided to put her on Lexapro, an anti-depressant with a promise of relieving her depression.

About six or seven weeks after starting the drug, Kayla Beltran took her own life.

Her father, Ray Beltran, alerted Houston police that his "beautiful" daughter was missing two days before she was found dead on Oct. 26 in a neighbor's yard.

"She had been diagnosed as having depression issues, which most teens have at some time," Beltran said. "The physician felt she would benefit from some of this medication, and we trusted the information we had from the FDA and the company itself that it was a safe product to take," Beltran said.

On Wednesday, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommended that anti-depressant drugs include a strong warning for young adults, ages 18 to 24, for possible increased risks of suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

The FDA already required such warnings on anti-depressant drugs prescribed for children and adolescents.

Had such a warning been on Kayla's medication, Beltran said, "I would absolutely very, very carefully considered the decision to allow her to take this medication. I would have educated myself on what the problems were and probably would have closely monitored what was going on," he said.

Beltran has hired Houston attorney Denman H. Heard, but has not filed a lawsuit over his daughter's death. Texas' current tort reform laws make it "nearly impossible" for families like the Beltrons to sue manufacturers over the "failure to warn," Heard said.

Beltran just wants people to know - to believe - the FDA's new warning about the danger of anti-depressants for young adults.

"It seems almost trite to say 'They would never do this,' " and yet until you yourself go through it, you simply cannot understand the veracity of the words; 'I knew my daughter and she would never have done this,' " he said.

Beltran and his only other daughter have "struggled" in the past six months to come to terms with Kayla's death.