

335 Conn. 525 NOVEMBER, 2020 525

Foisie v. Foisie

JANET H. FOISIE v. ROBERT A. FOISIE  
(SC 20384)

D'Auria, Mullins, Kahn, Ecker and Vertefeuille, Js.

*Syllabus*

Pursuant to statute (§ 52-599 (b)), a civil action or proceeding, including a dissolution action, shall not abate by reason of the death of any party but may be continued by or against the executor or administrator of the deceased party, and, if a defendant dies, the plaintiff, within one year after receiving notification of the defendant's death, may apply for an order to substitute the defendant's executor or administrator in the place of the defendant.

Pursuant further to statute (§ 52-599 (c) (1)), substitution under § 52-599 (b) is precluded when the purpose or object of the civil action is defeated or rendered useless by the death of a party.

The plaintiff appealed from the trial court's denial of her motion to substitute the coexecutors of the estate of R, the defendant and the plaintiff's former husband, pursuant to § 52-599 (b), in place of R. Approximately four years after the marriage of the plaintiff and R had been dissolved, and while R was still living, the plaintiff filed a motion to open the judgment of dissolution on the ground of fraud, claiming that R wilfully had failed to disclose assets he held in offshore accounts. The plaintiff and R stipulated that the judgment could be opened for the limited purpose of conducting discovery regarding the plaintiff's allegations, but, prior to complying with the court's discovery orders, R died. At the time of R's death, the motion to open was pending and the dissolution judgment remained open. In denying the plaintiff's motion to substitute, the trial court concluded that R's death defeated or rendered useless the underlying motion to open the dissolution judgment, and, thus, substitution of the coexecutors as defendants was prohibited under § 52-599 (c) (1). The court reasoned that, if the plaintiff's motion to open were granted, the marriage would be reinstated but would have automatically dissolved on the date of R's death pursuant to statute (§ 46b-40). Accordingly, the court determined, it could not again dissolve the marriage and redistribute the financial assets, as the plaintiff had requested in her motion to open. On appeal, the plaintiff claimed that R's death did not defeat or render useless her motion to open the dissolution judgment and thereby prohibit substitution of the coexecutors as defendants under § 52-599. *Held* that the trial court improperly denied the plaintiff's motion to substitute as defendants the coexecutors of R's estate: substitution of an executor or administrator for a deceased defendant is permitted under § 52-599 (b) when the action or proceeding to which the deceased defendant is a party is pending, and, in the present case, the plaintiff's motion to open was pending before the trial court

526

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 525

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*Foisie v. Foisie*

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at the time of R's death; moreover, when a motion to open a dissolution judgment on the basis of financial fraud, such as the plaintiff's motion, seeks to open that judgment only for the purpose of reconsideration of the financial orders, the granting of that motion does not reinstate the marriage and, thus, does not defeat or render useless the underlying divorce proceeding; in the present case, although the plaintiff did not specifically request, in her motion to open, that the trial court open the dissolution judgment for the limited purpose of reconsideration of the financial orders, the allegations in that motion and the supporting memorandum of law made clear that the plaintiff was seeking to have the court open the judgment for that limited purpose rather than for the purpose of reinstating the marriage, and, therefore, contrary to the trial court's conclusion, substitution was not precluded under § 52-599 (c) (1).

Argued January 22—officially released April 27, 2020\*

*Procedural History*

Action for the dissolution of marriage, and for other relief, brought to the Superior Court in the judicial district of New London at Norwich and tried to the court, *Hon. Joseph J. Purtill*, judge trial referee; judgment dissolving the marriage and granting certain other relief; thereafter, the court, *Diana, J.*, granted the plaintiff's motion to open the judgment in accordance with the parties' stipulation; subsequently, the court, *Carbonneau, J.*, denied the plaintiff's motion to substitute Sir Clare Roberts et al., coexecutors of the estate of Robert A. Foisie, as the defendants, and the plaintiff appealed. *Reversed in part; further proceedings.*

*Campbell D. Barrett*, with whom were *Johanna S. Katz* and, on the brief, *Jon T. Kukucka*, for the appellant (plaintiff).

*Janet A. Battey* and *Aidan R. Welsh* filed a brief for the Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers as amicus curiae.

*Opinion*

D'AURIA, J. In this appeal, we are asked to decide for the first time whether a party to a dissolution of mar-

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\* April 27, 2020, the date that this decision was released as a slip opinion, is the operative date for all substantive and procedural purposes.

335 Conn. 525      NOVEMBER, 2020      527

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Foisie v. Foisie

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riage action may substitute the executor or administrator of the estate of a deceased party in the place of the decedent under General Statutes § 52-599 when the pending civil proceeding seeks to open a judgment of dissolution on the basis of financial fraud. The plaintiff, Janet H. Foisie, claims that the trial court improperly denied her motion to substitute the coexecutors of the estate of the defendant, Robert A. Foisie,<sup>1</sup> her former husband, in his place. Specifically, she argues that the trial court incorrectly determined that, pursuant to § 52-599 (c), the defendant's death defeated and rendered useless her underlying motion to open the judgment of dissolution, thereby prohibiting substitution under § 52-599 (b). The trial court ruled that granting the motion to open would reinstate the parties' marriage, the reinstated marriage automatically would be dissolved under General Statutes § 46b-40 due to the defendant's death, and, thus, the reopened action for dissolution would abate, preventing the court from granting the plaintiff any relief. We disagree and therefore reverse in part the judgment of the trial court.

The following procedural history is relevant to our review of the plaintiff's claim. The trial court dissolved the parties' marriage in 2011. The judgment of dissolution incorporated a separation agreement entered into by the parties, which included financial orders. Approximately four years later, the plaintiff moved to open and set aside the judgment of dissolution on the ground of fraud or, alternatively, on the ground of mutual mistake. Specifically, the plaintiff alleged that the defendant had failed to disclose assets totaling several million dollars held in bank accounts in Switzerland.<sup>2</sup> The plaintiff

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<sup>1</sup> Neither the defendant nor the coexecutors of his estate participated in this appeal.

<sup>2</sup> The plaintiff subsequently amended her motion to open to include allegations that the defendant, in addition to failing to disclose the funds held in Switzerland, also failed to disclose the existence of loans he had made in excess of ten million dollars.

528

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 525

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Foisie v. Foisie

---

requested that the court open and set aside the judgment of dissolution and hold a new trial on all financial issues. In her supporting memorandum of law, she argued that “[t]he defendant wilfully and purposefully misrepresented the value of marital assets by failing to disclose the existence and value of his offshore holdings and thereby secured the stipulated dissolution judgment by means of direct and calculated fraud. . . . Law and equity require that the stipulated dissolution judgment be opened and vacated on such grounds, so that a fair division of the parties’ assets may be had.”

The parties stipulated that the judgment of dissolution could be opened for the limited purpose of conducting discovery regarding the plaintiff’s allegations of fraud.<sup>3</sup> Despite this stipulation, the defendant failed to produce any discovery and failed to comply with the trial court’s discovery orders, leading the court to hold him in contempt and to issue multiple financial sanctions. Prior to complying with the discovery orders, the defendant died, nearly seven years after the judgment of dissolution was rendered, while the motion to open was pending and the dissolution judgment remained open for the limited purpose of conducting discovery.

After the defendant’s death, the plaintiff moved to substitute the coexecutors of the defendant’s estate in place of the defendant pursuant to § 52-599.<sup>4</sup> The trial

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<sup>3</sup> The defendant stipulated that he was waiving his right to a hearing under *Oneglia v. Oneglia*, 14 Conn. App. 267, 270, 540 A.2d 713 (1988), which requires a party seeking to open a judgment of dissolution on the ground of fraud to substantiate the allegations of fraud beyond mere suspicion to be entitled to open the judgment for the limited purpose of conducting discovery. The defendant further stipulated that the plaintiff would have been able to sustain her burden of establishing “ ‘beyond a mere suspicion’ ” that he had engaged in fraud.

<sup>4</sup> In the plaintiff’s motion to substitute, she originally sought to substitute the defendant’s son, Michael R. Foisie, the curator of the estate, in place of the defendant. She subsequently amended her motion to substitute the coexecutors of the defendant’s estate, Sir Clare Roberts and C. Kamilah Roberts, in place of the defendant.

335 Conn. 525 NOVEMBER, 2020

529

---

Foisie v. Foisie

---

court denied the plaintiff's motion to substitute. The court explained that, pursuant to § 52-599 (c), to substitute the executors of the estate of a deceased party in place of the party, the pending civil action or proceeding must not be defeated or rendered useless by the death of the party. The trial court determined that, if the plaintiff's motion to open the dissolution judgment were granted, the parties' marriage would be reinstated. Because the parties' reinstated marriage would have automatically dissolved on the date of the defendant's death, pursuant to § 46b-40,<sup>5</sup> nearly seven years after the dissolution judgment had been rendered, the court reasoned that it could not again dissolve the parties' marriage and redistribute the financial assets, as the plaintiff requested in her motion to open. Thus, the trial court concluded that the motion to open was defeated or rendered useless, and, therefore, it had to deny the motion to substitute.

The plaintiff appealed to the Appellate Court from the trial court's denial of the motion to substitute. The appeal was transferred to this court pursuant to General Statutes § 51-199 (c) and Practice Book § 65-2.

The plaintiff argues that the trial court incorrectly concluded that opening the dissolution judgment would reinstate the parties' marriage, thereby defeating the underlying motion to open and prohibiting substitution. She argues that the granting of a motion to open a judgment of dissolution for purposes of reconsidering the financial orders does not reinstate the parties' marriage and, thus, does not abate upon the death of a party. As a result, she contends, the exceptions enumerated in § 52-599 (c) do not apply, but, rather, § 52-599 (b) permits substitution in the present case.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> General Statutes § 46b-40 (a) provides: "A marriage is dissolved only by (1) the death of one of the parties or (2) a decree of annulment or dissolution of the marriage by a court of competent jurisdiction."

<sup>6</sup> Although no brief was filed in opposition to the plaintiff's brief, the Connecticut chapter of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers filed

530

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 525

---

Foisie v. Foisie

---

We agree that when a motion to open a dissolution judgment on the basis of financial fraud seeks to open the judgment only for the limited purpose of reconsideration of the financial orders, granting the motion does not reinstate the party's marriage and, thus, does not defeat or render useless the underlying civil proceeding so that substitution is permitted under § 52-599. We also agree with the plaintiff that her motion to open the dissolution judgment in the present case sought to open the judgment only for the limited purpose of reconsideration of the financial orders. Therefore, we conclude that the underlying civil proceeding was not defeated or rendered useless by the defendant's death, and, thus, the trial court improperly denied the plaintiff's motion to substitute.

Although we generally review a trial court's decision whether to grant a motion for substitution of a party for abuse of discretion, in the present case, because the plaintiff's claim requires us both to consider the trial court's legal authority to grant the motion to substitute—whether there was a viable underlying civil proceeding—and to construe and gauge the applicability of statutes, our review is plenary. See *In re David B.*, 167 Conn. App. 428, 439, 142 A.3d 1277 (2016).

Substitution of a deceased party in a civil action or proceeding, including a dissolution action; see *Charles v. Charles*, 243 Conn. 255, 257, 701 A.2d 650 (1997) (“[a]n action for dissolution of a marriage ‘obviously is a civil action’”), cert. denied, 523 U.S. 1136, 118 S. Ct. 1838, 140 L. Ed. 2d 1089 (1998); is governed by § 52-599. Subsection (a) of § 52-599 provides that “[a] cause

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a brief as amicus curiae, in which it argued that, if the granting of a motion to open dissolves the divorce, thereby reinstating the parties' marriage, we should affirm the trial court's judgment because, otherwise, there would be serious consequences in cases in which a party subsequently has remarried. If granting the motion, however, would affect only the financial orders, the amicus argues, we should reverse the trial court's judgment.

335 Conn. 525 NOVEMBER, 2020

531

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Foisie v. Foisie

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or right of action shall not be lost or destroyed by the death of any person, but shall survive in favor of or against the executor or administrator of the deceased person.” Subsection (b) of § 52-599 specifies that “[a] civil action or proceeding shall not abate by reason of the death of any party thereto, but may be continued by or against the executor or administrator of the decedent. . . . If a party defendant dies, the plaintiff, within one year after receiving written notification of the defendant’s death, may apply to the court in which the action is pending for an order to substitute the decedent’s executor or administrator in the place of the decedent, and, upon due service and return of the order, the action may proceed.” Subsection (c) of § 52-599, however, prohibits substitution in three limited circumstances: “The provisions of this section shall not apply: (1) To any cause or right of action or to any civil action or proceeding the purpose or object of which is defeated or rendered useless by the death of any party thereto, (2) to any civil action or proceeding whose prosecution or defense depends upon the continued existence of the persons who are plaintiffs or defendants, or (3) to any civil action upon a penal statute.” General Statutes § 52-599 (c).

In interpreting § 52-599, we are guided by our well established legal principles regarding statutory construction: “Because the issue presents a question of statutory interpretation, our analysis is guided by General Statutes § 1-2z, the plain meaning rule. In seeking to determine the meaning of a statute, § 1-2z directs us first to consider the text of the statute itself and its relationship to the broader statutory scheme. If, after examining such text and considering such relationship, the meaning of such text is plain and unambiguous and does not yield absurd or unworkable results, extratextual evidence of the meaning of the statute shall not be considered. General Statutes § 1-2z. The test to deter-

532

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 525

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Foisie v. Foisie

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mine ambiguity is whether the statute, when read in context, is susceptible to more than one reasonable interpretation.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *State v. Dudley*, 332 Conn. 639, 645, 212 A.3d 1268 (2019).

The language of subsections (a) and (b) of § 52-599 is broad. Subsection (a) permits any “cause or right of action” to survive in the event of a party’s death. Subsection (b) specifies the procedure for seeking substitution and explicitly allows substitution in any “civil action or proceeding . . . .” Under subsection (b), when a plaintiff seeks to substitute the executor of the estate for the deceased defendant, the plaintiff must file the motion in the court in which the action is pending within one year of receiving notice of the defendant’s death. We infer from this language that, to permit substitution, there must be a pending action or proceeding. Because, at the time of the defendant’s death, the plaintiff’s motion to open was pending before the trial court, which already had granted the motion in part for discovery purposes, we have no trouble concluding that there was a pending action and that substitution was permissible under the unambiguous language of subsection (b). See *Fairfield Merrittview Ltd. Partnership v. Norwalk*, 320 Conn. 535, 559–60, 133 A.3d 140 (2016) (civil action is pending when either action has been commenced, but there is no judgment, or judgment has been rendered, then opened); *Bank of Stamford v. Schlesinger*, 160 Conn. App. 32, 44 n.9, 125 A.3d 209 (2015) (same).

This is consistent with our prior cases interpreting § 52-599, in which this court has described subsection (a) as having a “broad sweep,” limited only by the three narrow exceptions enumerated in subsection (c). *Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities v. Greenwich Catholic Elementary School System, Inc.*, 202 Conn. 609, 614, 522 A.2d 785 (1987). This broad applica-



335 Conn. 525 NOVEMBER, 2020

533

---

Foisie v. Foisie

---

tion of this provision reflects “the general policy favoring the continuation and timely resolution of actions on the merits whenever possible.” *In re David B.*, supra, 167 Conn. App. 442. We have explained that the purpose of § 52-599 was to abrogate “[the common-law rule that] the death of a sole plaintiff or defendant abated an action . . . .” (Citation omitted; footnote omitted.) *Burton v. Browd*, 258 Conn. 566, 570–71, 783 A.2d 457 (2001); see also *In re David B.*, supra, 441 (rejecting common law’s overtechnical formal requirements in favor of substitution and recognizing policy that “[t]he addition or substitution of parties to legal proceedings generally is favored in order to permit courts to make timely and complete determinations on behalf of parties with genuine interests in the outcome of controversies brought before them”). Thus, as long as all filing requirements are satisfied, permitting substitution is the rule, unless one of the three exceptions in subsection (c) applies.

The trial court in the present case determined that the first exception applied—that the plaintiff’s motion to open was defeated or rendered useless by the defendant’s death.<sup>7</sup> This exception focuses on whether a party’s death affects the continuing vitality of the proceedings. See *Groton v. Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities*, 169 Conn. 89, 100–101, 362 A.2d 1359 (1975) (analyzing whether party’s death affected con-

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<sup>7</sup> The trial court did not address the other two exceptions in § 52-599 (c)—whether the motion to open depended on the continued existence of the defendant, or whether the motion to open involved a civil action on a penal statute. We determine that neither of these other exceptions applies in the present case. As to whether the motion to open depends on the defendant’s continued existence, for the same reason that the first exception does not apply, this exception also does not apply—the defendant’s estate can take the place of the defendant because granting the motion to open would not reinstate the parties’ marriage but, rather, would affect only the financial orders of the dissolution judgment. As to the third exception, this case does not involve a civil action on a penal statute.

tinuing vitality of proceedings); *id.*, 103–104 (*Cotter, J.*, concurring) (same). Under this exception, courts have looked to the remedy sought in determining the viability of the underlying action. For example, this court has permitted substitution in cases in which the death of the party had no effect on the continuing vitality of the proceeding because the estate could fill the shoes of the decedent, such as when the pending civil case sought monetary damages, which could be awarded to or against the estate just as damages could be awarded to or against the deceased party had the party survived. See *Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities v. Greenwich Catholic Elementary School System, Inc.*, *supra*, 202 Conn. 614 (recovery of monetary losses in connection with age discrimination claim would enhance value of decedent’s estate); *Groton v. Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities*, *supra*, 103–104 (*Cotter, J.*, concurring); see also *Hillcroft Partners v. Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities*, 205 Conn. 324, 331, 533 A.2d 852 (1987) (§ 52-599 (b) is applicable when “executor has entered the administrative proceeding by filing an amended complaint seeking any remedy to which the deceased complainant may have been entitled” (emphasis omitted; internal quotation marks omitted)); *In re David B.*, *supra*, 167 Conn. App. 446 (“the applicability of § 52-599 [when a party seeks to substitute the estate of a deceased plaintiff] reasonably can be viewed as limited to those civil cases in which, despite a party’s death, the continuation of the litigation arguably could benefit the decedent’s estate, typically in some pecuniary manner”). In contrast, courts have prohibited substitution in cases in which the action sought specific relief that was unique to the parties, such as seeking an injunction for specific performance. See *Groton v. Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities*, *supra*, 100–101.

Whether this exception applies in the present case requires us to determine whether the plaintiff’s motion

335 Conn. 525 NOVEMBER, 2020

535

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Foisie v. Foisie

---

to open the dissolution judgment on the basis of fraud was defeated or rendered useless by the defendant's death. In so doing, we are guided by the following legal principles regarding motions to open judgments of dissolution. Although, under General Statutes § 52-212a,<sup>8</sup> generally, a motion to open must be filed within four months following the date on which judgment was rendered, a judgment in a civil action, including "[a] marital judgment based upon a stipulation may be opened if the stipulation, and thus the judgment, was obtained by fraud. . . . The power of the court to vacate a judgment for fraud is regarded as inherent and independent of statutory provisions authorizing the opening of judgments; hence judgments obtained by fraud may be attacked at any time." (Citation omitted; internal quotation marks omitted.) *Billington v. Billington*, 220 Conn. 212, 217–18, 595 A.2d 1377 (1991); see also *Reville v. Reville*, 312 Conn. 428, 441, 93 A.3d 1076 (2014) ("[a]n exception to the four month limitation applies, however, if a party can show, inter alia, that the judgment was obtained by fraud").

"There are three limitations on a court's ability to grant relief from a dissolution judgment secured by fraud: (1) there must have been no laches or unreasonable delay by the injured party after the fraud was discovered; (2) there must be clear proof of the fraud; and (3) there is a [reasonable probability] that the result of the new trial will be different." (Footnote omitted; internal quotation marks omitted.) *Reville v. Reville*, supra, 312 Conn. 442. Additionally, "the granting of such relief must not unfairly jeopardize interests of reliance that have taken shape on the basis of the judgment."

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<sup>8</sup> General Statutes § 52-212a provides in relevant part: "Unless otherwise provided by law and except in such cases in which the court has continuing jurisdiction, a civil judgment or decree rendered in the Superior Court may not be opened or set aside unless a motion to open or set aside is filed within four months following the date on which it was rendered or passed. . . ."

(Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Billington v. Billington*, supra, 220 Conn. 218 n.6.

This court has not expressly addressed the present issue—whether a motion to open a dissolution judgment on the basis of fraud abates after a party’s death. The determination of this issue turns on the relief requested in the motion to open. Our trial courts have entertained motions to open dissolution judgments, which sought, on the basis of fraud, to set aside the dissolution of the marriage and, thereby, to reinstate the parties’ marriage.<sup>9</sup> See *Bonilla v. Bonilla*, Superior Court, judicial district of Hartford, Docket No. FA-12-4063256-S (August 5, 2014) (60 Conn. L. Rptr. 778, 779–80) (court granted motion to open dissolution judgment, vacated dissolution judgment and financial orders and reinstated validity of original marriage, where plaintiff alleged that defendant had tricked her into defaulting in dissolution proceedings, then remarried her); *Levesque v. Levesque*, Docket No. FA-96-007L336, 1996 WL 521167, \*1 (Conn. Super. September 3, 1996) (court granted motion to open dissolution judgment on ground that “[n]o harm would come to anyone if [the] judgment were vacated, and it would foster the preservation and stability of the family, which is the public policy of the [s]tate,” where defendant had alleged that dissolution was mistake and both parties wanted to reconcile and continue marriage). In these cases, because granting the motion to

<sup>9</sup> We note that, although parties have filed motions to open dissolution judgments seeking reinstatement of the dissolved marriage, the granting of these motions “must not unfairly jeopardize interests of reliance that have taken shape on the basis of the judgment.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Billington v. Billington*, supra, 220 Conn. 218 n.6. Even if a stipulated judgment of dissolution were obtained by fraud and one of the parties would not have agreed to the dissolution of the marriage in the absence of the fraud, a court would have to consider whether reliance on the dissolution judgment, for example, the subsequent remarriage of the parties to different people, should prohibit the opening of the judgment and the reinstating of the dissolved marriage.

335 Conn. 525 NOVEMBER, 2020

537

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Foisie v. Foisie

---

open would reinstate the marriage, a party's death while the motion was pending would have defeated and rendered useless the underlying civil proceeding, as the reinstated marriage would automatically be dissolved as of the date of the deceased party's death. See General Statutes § 46b-40.

Although a motion to open, if granted, may vacate the dissolution of the marriage and thereby reinstate the marriage, that does not mean that the granting of every motion to open necessarily vacates the dissolution of the marriage. Not every motion to open *seeks* to vacate the dissolution of the marriage. Rather, courts in this state consistently have granted motions to open dissolution judgments on the basis of fraud for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders.<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., *Reinke v. Sing*, 186 Conn. App. 665, 667 n.1, 201 A.3d 404 (2018) (trial court granted motion to open dissolution judgment in accordance with parties' stipulation for limited purpose of permitting court to reconsider financial orders); see also *Lavy v. Lavy*, 190 Conn. App. 186, 192, 210 A.3d 98 (2019) (same); *Forgione v. Forgione*, 186 Conn. App. 525, 528, 200 A.3d 190 (2018) (same); cf. *Jenks v. Jenks*, 232 Conn. 750, 752, 657 A.2d 1107 (1995) ("trial court . . . granted the motion to open and set aside that part of the stipulated judgment that dealt with the disposition of the marital property").

When courts have granted motions to open dissolution judgments on the basis of fraud for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders, courts have used the date of the original dissolution judgment as the valuation date for the marital property. We infer from this that courts in those cases have considered the orig-

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<sup>10</sup> Additionally, dissolution judgments may be opened for other limited purposes, such as conducting discovery regarding a claim of fraud. See *Oneglia v. Oneglia*, 14 Conn. App. 267, 270, 540 A.2d 713 (1988). Opening dissolution judgments for this limited purpose might never lead to the reinstatement of the underlying marriage.

538

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 525

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Foisie v. Foisie

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inal judgment of dissolution to remain intact despite the granting of the motion to open to reconsider the financial orders. See *Lavy v. Lavy*, supra, 190 Conn. App. 204–205 (using value of marital property on date of dissolution to determine whether plaintiff was harmed by defendant’s financial fraud despite opening dissolution judgment to reconsider financial award); see also *Reville v. Reville*, supra, 312 Conn. 433 (trial court used date of dissolution judgment as valuation date for marital property when reconsidering financial award); *Forgione v. Forgione*, supra, 186 Conn. App. 529 (same); *Taveres-Doram v. Doram*, Docket No. FA-04-4002471-S, 2007 WL 155155, \*6 (Conn. Super. January 2, 2007) (court’s opening of dissolution judgment for limited purpose of reconsidering financial award did not affect dissolution of marriage or custodial orders but determined new financial award based on value of marital assets as of date of dissolution decree); cf. *Weinstein v. Weinstein*, 275 Conn. 671, 708 n.28, 882 A.2d 53 (2005) (“[t]he result of this case [reversal of the denial of the motion to open the judgment of dissolution on the ground of fraud and remanding for further proceedings regarding assets] essentially is no different [from] any other reversal of judgment in a dissolution action requiring a new trial, affording the trial court enormous discretion, as to valuation and division of the marital assets and other attendant financial orders”). The granting of these motions to open for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders did not reinstate the parties’ marriages. Allowing parties to open dissolution judgments, when financial fraud has been alleged, for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders without reinstating the parties’ marriage, is both equitable and sound public policy. If the granting of a motion to open a judgment of dissolution on the basis of financial fraud, regardless of the relief requested, led to the reinstatement of the marriage, parties who have suffered from financial

335 Conn. 525 NOVEMBER, 2020

539

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Foisie v. Foisie

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fraud but have since remarried would be stuck between the proverbial rock and a hard place—they would have to choose between redress for the financial fraud and the validity of their subsequent marriage. See *Bonilla v. Bonilla*, supra, 60 Conn. L. Rptr. 779 (voiding subsequent remarriage of parties after granting motion to open dissolution judgment and reinstating dissolved marriage because, “[i]f a marriage is contracted before the prior marriage of one of the parties is dissolved and while the spouse from that prior marriage is still living, the subsequent marriage is void”); see also footnote 9 of this opinion. Additionally, if the parties have remarried, this result also would be inequitable and unfair to the spouse of either party, who had the reasonable expectation that the prior marriage had been dissolved.

Additionally, this is consistent with how we have valued marital property when a dissolution judgment has been reversed for reconsideration of the financial orders. In *Sunbury v. Sunbury*, 216 Conn. 673, 583 A.2d 636 (1990), this court was asked to determine how, on remand, to value marital assets after financial orders contained in a judgment of dissolution were set aside on appeal. *Id.*, 674–75. Relying on General Statutes (Rev. to 1985) § 46b-81 (a)<sup>11</sup> and General Statutes § 46b-82,<sup>12</sup> we determined that property that is the subject of financial orders in dissolution proceedings ordinarily must be valued as of the date of dissolution: “In the absence of any exceptional intervening circumstances occurring in the meantime, [the] date of the granting of the divorce would be the proper time as of which to determine the value of the estate of the parties upon which to base

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<sup>11</sup> General Statutes (Rev. to 1985) § 46b-81 (a) provides in relevant part: “At the time of entering a decree . . . dissolving a marriage . . . the superior court may assign to either the husband or wife all or any part of the estate of the other . . . .”

<sup>12</sup> General Statutes § 46b-82 (a) provides in relevant part: “At the time of entering the decree, the Superior Court may order either of the parties to pay alimony to the other . . . .”

the division of property.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Id.*, 676. Despite the financial orders contained within the dissolution judgment having been set aside, the dissolution judgment date remained intact and, thus, was the proper date by which to determine the value of the marital property. *Id.* Setting aside a limited portion of the dissolution judgment—the financial orders—did not open the entire judgment of dissolution or reinstate the parties’ marriage. Although *Sunbury* did not involve a motion to open, it is instructive that, in granting the relief sought on appeal and setting aside the financial orders, we did not contemplate or order the reinstatement of the parties’ marriage.

The Appellate Court, relying on *Sunbury*, came to a similar conclusion in *LaBorne v. LaBorne*, 189 Conn. App. 353, 207 A.3d 58 (2019), in which it held that, when a trial court grants a motion to open a dissolution judgment on the basis of fraud for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial award, in reconsidering the financial award, “the appropriate date of valuation of the parties’ marital assets, for purposes of the distribution of those assets, was the date of its original decree . . . .” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Id.*, 362. The Appellate Court reasoned that, because marital property ordinarily must be valued as of the date of the dissolution judgment, the marital property had to be valued as of the date of the original decree, not as of the date that the financial orders were reconsidered. *Id.*, 362–63. Implicit in this analysis and in the relief orders was a recognition that opening the dissolution judgment for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders did not reinstate the parties’ marriage.

Because granting a motion to open the judgment of dissolution for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders does not reinstate the parties’ marriage, a party’s death would not necessarily defeat such a motion or render it useless. If the granting of the motion



335 Conn. 525 NOVEMBER, 2020

541

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Foisie v. Foisie

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served to reinstate the marriage, the party's death would defeat and render useless the motion, because, once granted, the reinstated marriage would automatically be dissolved as of the date of the deceased party's death; General Statutes § 46b-40; and, thus, the court could not then reconsider the financial award and redissolve the marriage.<sup>13</sup> Rather, despite the defendant's death in the present case, and in light of the relief sought, the motion to open could be granted for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders, which would not affect the status of the marriage and therefore would not defeat or render useless the motion. Accordingly, this exception to substitution under § 52-599 (c) did not apply in the present case.

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<sup>13</sup> In support of its conclusion that the plaintiff's motion to open in the present case was defeated and rendered useless by the defendant's death, the trial court relied on a series of Superior Court cases that held that, if a party dies during the pendency of a dissolution proceeding before judgment of dissolution has been rendered, the marriage is automatically dissolved under § 46b-40, and, thus, substitution of the deceased party is prohibited because the dissolution proceeding is defeated and rendered useless. See *Diana v. Diana*, Superior Court, judicial district of Tolland, Docket No. FA-99-69335 (September 14, 2001) (30 Conn. L. Rptr. 402, 403) (“[t]he death of a spouse automatically dissolves the marriage, and once the marriage is dissolved by the death of one of the parties, the purpose for continuing an action seeking to dissolve the marriage becomes meaningless”); *Dalton v. Dalton*, Superior Court, judicial district of Waterbury, Docket No. FA-95-126681 (March 7, 1997) (19 Conn. L. Rptr. 169, 169) (“the death of the plaintiff has ended the court's jurisdiction over the parties with regard to the [pending] divorce”); *Misheff v. Misheff*, Docket No. FA-94-0139817, 1995 WL 781428, \*2 (Conn. Super. December 12, 1995) (“if an action for divorce is commenced, and one of the parties dies thereafter, but before the entry of a final decree, the action abates”).

All of these cases, however, are distinguishable because they involved the death of a party prior to the rendering of a judgment of dissolution. In those cases, the party's death automatically dissolved the marriage under § 46b-40, and, thus, the action for dissolution abated because the trial court could not dissolve an already dissolved marriage. These cases would apply to the present case only if the granting of the motion to open reinstated the parties' marriage because, then, the defendant's death would automatically dissolve the reinstated marriage. These cases, however, do not shed any light on whether granting a motion to open a dissolution judgment in fact reinstates the marriage.

542 NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 525

*Foisie v. Foisie*

In the absence of the applicability of one of the three exceptions enumerated in § 52-599 (c), when a party seeks to open a dissolution judgment on the basis of fraud for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders, we discern no reason to prohibit substitution of the executor or the administrator of the estate in the event of a party's death.<sup>14</sup> Not only, as explained, would granting the motion to open not affect the status of the parties' marriage, but, also, this is the kind of matter in which the executor or administrator of the estate can step into the role of the deceased party. As in other cases in which substitution has been permitted under § 52-599, the granting of the motion to open for this limited purpose and the resulting reconsideration of the financial orders would do no more than enhance or diminish the estate the same as it would have enhanced or diminished the deceased defendant's assets if he had lived. See *Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities v. Greenwich Catholic Elementary School System, Inc.*,

<sup>14</sup> The Appellate Court has reached a similar conclusion, albeit sub silentio. In *Berzins v. Berzins*, 122 Conn. App. 674, 998 A.2d 1265 (2010), rev'd, 306 Conn. 651, 51 A.3d 941 (2012), the defendant husband filed a motion to open the judgment of dissolution, which the trial court denied. *Id.*, 676. The defendant husband appealed to the Appellate Court but died during the pendency of the appeal. *Id.* The Appellate Court stayed the appeal until there was compliance with § 52-599. *Id.*, 676-77. The plaintiff wife subsequently filed a motion to substitute the administrator of the defendant's estate as the defendant, which the trial court granted. *Id.*, 677. The administrator did not object to the motion to substitute. *Id.*, 680.

As the proceedings progressed, the plaintiff wife filed, and the trial court granted, a motion for sanctions and attorney's fees against the administrator, who then appealed to the Appellate Court, arguing that the trial court lacked subject matter jurisdiction to sanction him on the ground that he had been improperly substituted as a defendant because the motion to open abated with the defendant husband's death. *Id.*, 678, 680. The Appellate Court determined that the administrator was barred from raising this claim on the basis of the principles of collateral estoppel; *id.*, 681; because the Appellate Court, in deciding the motion to substitute, already had "determined that the administrator was the proper party to be substituted in [the] action and that the [plaintiff wife's] action did not abate upon the death of [the defendant husband]. See General Statutes § 52-599." *Berzins v. Berzins*, supra, 122 Conn. App. 680.

335 Conn. 525 NOVEMBER, 2020

543

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Foisie v. Foisie

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supra, 202 Conn. 614 (“claim of the deceased complainant before the [Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities] for monetary losses resulting from the termination of her employment is not ‘defeated or rendered useless’ by her death, because a recovery upon such a claim would enhance the value of her estate”). Additionally, the executor or administrator of the estate would have access to the defendant’s financial records and assets, which are the subject of the motion to open. See *id.* (deceased complainant’s continued existence was not necessary to prosecution of claim because estate and defendant had access to prior testimony and other evidence).

Moreover, permitting a party to substitute the executor or administrator of the estate of the deceased party and to open a dissolution judgment for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders when fraud has been alleged is consistent with the general principle that, “[i]n family matters, the court exercises its equitable powers.” *Oneglia v. Oneglia*, 14 Conn. App. 267, 271, 540 A.2d 713 (1988). “While an action for divorce or dissolution of marriage is a creature of statute, it is essentially equitable in its nature.” *Pasquariello v. Pasquariello*, 168 Conn. 579, 584, 362 A.2d 835 (1975). The trial court has considerable discretion to balance equities in a dissolution proceeding. See *Sunbury v. Sunbury*, 210 Conn. 170, 174, 553 A.2d 612 (1989) (“The power to act equitably is the keystone to the court’s ability to fashion relief in the infinite variety of circumstances which arise out of the dissolution of a marriage. Without this wide discretion and broad equitable power, the courts in some cases might be unable fairly to resolve the parties’ dispute . . . .”). “For that reason, equitable remedies are not bound by formula but are molded to the needs of justice.” *Oneglia v. Oneglia*, supra, 272. “[I]n some situations, the principle of protection of the finality of judgments must give way to the

544

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 525

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Foisie v. Foisie

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principle of fairness and equity.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Brody v. Brody*, 153 Conn. App. 625, 632, 103 A.3d 981 (quoting *Kim v. Magnotta*, 249 Conn. 94, 109, 733 A.2d 809 (1999)), cert. denied, 315 Conn. 910, 105 A.3d 901 (2014).

As a result, we must determine whether the plaintiff in the present case requested that the court open the dissolution judgment in its entirety or for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders. The plaintiff’s motion to open was labeled simply as “Motion to Open, Postjudgment.” She requested that the trial court “open and set aside its September 8, 2011 judgment of dissolution of marriage, which incorporated a separation agreement entered into by the parties, and attendant financial orders.” On the basis of the labeling of her motion, the plaintiff did not specifically request that the court open the dissolution judgment for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders. Rather, the motion could fairly be read to seek to open the dissolution judgment in its entirety, affecting the status of her marriage (or rather, of her divorce).

Even when a motion to open does not expressly seek to have the court open the dissolution judgment only for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial award, however, we have looked to the substance of the motion and the relief sought in determining the extent to which a party seeks the opening of the dissolution judgment. For example, in *Reville v. Reville*, supra, 312 Conn. 428, the plaintiff filed a motion to open and set aside the dissolution judgment on the ground of financial fraud four years after the judgment of dissolution, arguing that the court should reconsider the financial award because the defendant had failed to disclose certain marital property. *Id.*, 432–33. Although the motion to open was broadly labeled, seeking to open and set aside the judgment of dissolution, on the basis of the allegations and the relief requested, the trial court and

335 Conn. 525 NOVEMBER, 2020

545

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Foisie v. Foisie

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this court treated the motion as a request to open the judgment for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial award. See *id.* Similarly, in *Kenworthy v. Kenworthy*, 180 Conn. 129, 130, 429 A.2d 837 (1980), despite labeling the motion as a motion to open the dissolution judgment, “the defendant expressed dissatisfaction only with that portion of the judgment which involved the disposition of the family residence,” and, thus, the motion was granted only as to the financial orders, leaving the portion of the judgment dissolving the marriage intact. These cases are consistent with our judicial policy of construing pleadings broadly and realistically. See *Byrne v. Avery Center for Obstetrics & Gynecology, P.C.*, 314 Conn. 433, 462, 102 A.3d 32 (2014) (pleadings should be construed “broadly and realistically, rather than narrowly and technically” (internal quotation marks omitted)); see also *Fairfield Merrittview Ltd. Partnership v. Norwalk*, *supra*, 320 Conn. 554–55 (courts must look to substance of motion rather than to its form).

We now turn to the allegations in the plaintiff’s motion to open and supporting memorandum of law, from which it is clear that the plaintiff sought to have the court open the judgment of dissolution for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders, not for the purpose of reinstating the parties’ marriage. In her motion to open, the plaintiff “assert[ed] that the dissolution judgment was secured by fraud . . . specifically, the defendant failed to disclose funds that he was holding in offshore bank accounts . . . .” As a result, the plaintiff requested that the trial court “hold a new trial as to all financial issues.” Similarly, in her memorandum of law in support of her motion to open, the plaintiff argued that the fraud was premised on nondisclosure of certain offshore bank accounts and that, in light of this financial fraud, “[l]aw and equity require[d] that the stipulated dissolution judgment be opened and

546

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 525

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Foisie v. Foisie

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vacated on such grounds, so that a fair division of the parties' assets may be had."

It is clear that the alleged fraud involved the defendant's assets alone. It is also clear that the plaintiff, in filing the motion to open, requested that the court reconsider the financial orders in response to this financial fraud. She did not request that the court open and set aside that portion of the dissolution judgment dissolving the marriage. She specified that she wanted a new trial as to the financial orders. She was not attempting to have the marriage reinstated. Rather, she was seeking "a fair division of the parties' assets." Although the plaintiff perhaps could have been more explicit by stating specifically that she was requesting that the judgment of dissolution be opened for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders, under *Reville* and *Kenworthy*, construing her pleadings realistically, as we must, the substance of her motion and supporting memorandum of law dispels any confusion that she was requesting that the dissolution judgment be opened for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders.

Because the plaintiff sought the opening of the dissolution judgment only for the limited purpose of reconsidering the financial orders, the granting of the motion would not have reinstated the parties' marriage, and the coexecutors of the defendant's estate could have been substituted as defendants and stepped into the deceased defendant's shoes. Thus, the defendant's death did not defeat and render useless the underlying civil proceeding. Therefore, the trial court improperly denied the plaintiff's motion to substitute the coexecutors of the defendant's estate in place of the defendant.

The judgment is reversed only as to the denial of the plaintiff's motion to substitute as defendants the coexecutors of the defendant's estate and the case is

335 Conn. 547      NOVEMBER, 2020      547

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Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

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remanded with direction to grant the motion and for further proceedings according to law; the judgment is affirmed in all other respects.

In this opinion the other justices concurred.

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GERALYNN BOONE, EXECUTRIX (ESTATE  
OF MARY BOONE) v. BOEHRINGER  
INGELHEIM PHARMACEUTICALS,  
INC., ET AL.  
(SC 20200)

Robinson, C. J., and Palmer, McDonald, D'Auria,  
Mullins, Kahn and Vertefeulle, Js.

*Syllabus*

The plaintiff, the executrix of the estate of the decedent, M, sought to recover damages from the defendants, alleging that a certain brand-name anticoagulant medication they had designed, manufactured or sold wrongfully caused M's death. The defendants had received approval from the United States Food and Drug Administration to market the medication, and, for some time, M took the medication without significant side effects. Several years later, M suffered a gastrointestinal bleed and subsequently died. The plaintiff alleged that the defendants negligently failed to give adequate warnings, directions, and instructions to guard against the risk of bleeding caused by the medication and to investigate the benefits of establishing a therapeutic range for its administration. The plaintiff also alleged that the medication was defectively designed due to the absence of a reversal agent. The trial court granted the defendants' motion for summary judgment on the claim relating to the absence of a reversal agent, concluding, inter alia, that it was preempted by federal law. Thereafter, the plaintiff filed a request to charge, asking the court to instruct the jury that the defendants had improperly failed to maintain certain materials for the purpose of discovery, specifically, that they had lost or destroyed files of a former employee, L, while litigating prior federal actions relating to the medication, and that the jury could draw an adverse inference from the loss or destruction of such materials. At the conclusion of the trial, the court issued a spoliation instruction. The trial court also granted in part the defendants' motion in limine, seeking to exclude evidence, testimony, or argument regarding their failure to test regrading a certain dose of the medication on the ground that a failure to test claim was preempted by federal law. The jury returned a verdict for the defendants, finding that, although the defendants negligently failed to give adequate warnings, directions, and

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Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

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instructions to guard against the risk of bleeding caused by the medication, the plaintiff failed to prove that the defendants' conduct caused M's death. The trial court rendered judgment thereon for the defendants, from which the plaintiff appealed. *Held:*

1. The trial court did not abuse its discretion in excluding evidence and arguments relating to the issue of spoliation, as the doctrine of induced error precluded the plaintiff from making that claim: the plaintiff represented during argument on her request to charge regarding the defendants' failure to maintain L's files that the requested instruction would obviate the need to introduce evidence relating to spoliation and that the instruction itself, together with evidence introduced at trial relating to L's involvement in the development of the medication, would adequately provide the jury with the information it would need to draw an adverse inference against the defendants; accordingly, the plaintiff having had the opportunity to introduce evidence relating to L's involvement in developing the medication, having asked the court to give the requested spoliation instruction, and the court having done so in reliance on the plaintiff's representations, the plaintiff could not prevail on the ground that opening statements and evidence informing the jury about the defendants' loss or destruction of L's files was necessary to put the requested instruction in an appropriate context.
2. The trial court did not abuse its discretion in precluding the plaintiff from introducing, on rebuttal, an excerpt from the deposition of C, the defendants' senior vice president for clinical development; the court correctly concluded that the proffered excerpt was not proper rebuttal because C was not discussing a situation in which a person's gastrointestinal bleed had resolved prior to his or her death but, rather, was discussing only that a gastrointestinal bleed can indirectly lead to death, and such a broad statement did not contradict the more precise testimony of the defendants' experts that M's death was caused by other medical conditions rather than M's gastrointestinal bleed, which had resolved more than two weeks before M's death.
3. The trial court properly granted the defendants' motion for summary judgment on the plaintiff's claim relating to the defendants' failure to market a reversal agent for its medication, as the plaintiff's claim was preempted by federal law: five years after the medication was approved by the Food and Drug Administration, and after M's death, the defendants obtained approval to market a chemical reversal agent for the medication, and, in order to have cured the design defect alleged by the plaintiff, the defendants would have had to bring the reversal agent to market before M's gastrointestinal bleed, and, because there was no dispute that the reversal agent was not approved by the Food and Drug Administration until after the incident that gave rise to the plaintiff's design defect claim, the defendants could not have satisfied their alleged state law duty to M without marketing an unapproved drug in violation of federal law; moreover, the plaintiff's assertion that it was technologically



335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

549

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Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

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- feasible to develop the reversal agent before M's death was insufficient to preclude preemption, as that fact was inapposite to the issue of whether marketing the reversal agent prior to M's gastrointestinal bleed would have required the Food and Drug Administration's special permission and assistance, and the possibility that that agency would have looked favorably on an earlier application for approval of the reversal agent did not alter the fact that, at the time of M's death, the defendants were precluded from marketing the reversal agent under federal law.
4. The trial court did not commit reversible error when it issued a curative instruction to the jury after closing arguments that it could not hold the defendants liable for failing to conduct tests regarding a particular dose of the medication that were described in a particular exhibit; contrary to the plaintiff's claim, the defendants did not open the door to the plaintiff's use of that exhibit during closing argument, the trial court's instruction merely precluded the jury from considering a single exhibit to support a particular claim that the court had determined was preempted by federal law, and the plaintiff was not unfairly prejudiced, as the trial court's curative instruction was brief, contained no explicit reprimand, and was conveyed to the jury with reasonably measured language.

Argued December 19, 2019—officially released May 4, 2020\*

*Procedural History*

Action to recover damages for personal injuries sustained as a result of an allegedly defective product designed, manufactured or sold by the defendants, and for other relief, brought to the Superior Court in the judicial district of Hartford, Complex Litigation Docket, where the court, *Moll, J.*, granted in part the defendants' motions for summary judgment and rendered judgment thereon; thereafter, the case was tried to the jury; verdict and judgment for the defendants, from which the plaintiff appealed. *Affirmed.*

*Brenden P. Leydon*, with whom were *Neal L. Moskow* and *Kelly A. Koehler*, pro hac vice, and, on the brief, *Richard I. Nemeroff*, pro hac vice, for the appellant (plaintiff).

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\* May 4, 2020, the date that this decision was released as a slip opinion, is the operative date for all substantive and procedural purposes.

550

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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*Paul W. Schmidt*, pro hac vice, with whom were *Patrick M. Fahey*, *Gregory Halperin* and *Michael X. Imbroscio*, pro hac vice, and, on the brief, *Phyllis A. Jones*, pro hac vice, for the appellees (defendants).

*Opinion*

KAHN, J. The plaintiff, Geralynn Boone, the executrix of the estate of Mary Boone (decedent), brought the present action against the defendants, Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc., and Boehringer Ingelheim International, GmbH, alleging, inter alia, that an oral anticoagulant medication, Pradaxa, wrongfully caused the decedent's death. A jury returned a verdict in favor of the defendants, from which the plaintiff now appeals.<sup>1</sup> The plaintiff claims that the trial court improperly (1) precluded evidence and arguments related to spoliation, (2) prevented the plaintiff from using an excerpt from a particular deposition on rebuttal, (3) granted the defendants' motion for summary judgment on a design defect claim relating to the absence of a reversal agent, and (4) issued a curative instruction to the jury after closing arguments. We disagree with each of these claims and, accordingly, affirm the judgment of the trial court.

The following facts and procedural history are relevant to the present appeal. After experiencing intermittent heart palpitations in 2003, the decedent was diagnosed with nonvalvular atrial fibrillation. That condition may cause the formation of blood clots and, as a result, substantially increased the decedent's risk of suffering an ischemic stroke. In order to reduce that risk, Jeffrey Fierstein, a cardiologist, prescribed an anticoagulant named warfarin to the decedent. The use of warfarin requires dietary restrictions, frequent blood

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<sup>1</sup> The plaintiff appealed from the judgment of the trial court to the Appellate Court, and we transferred the appeal to this court pursuant to Practice Book § 65-1 and General Statutes § 51-199 (c).

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

551

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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testing, and dose titration to keep the concentration of medication present in the bloodstream within an accepted therapeutic range. Like all anticoagulants, warfarin increases the risk of uncontrolled bleeding.<sup>2</sup>

In October, 2010, the defendants received approval from the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to begin selling dabigatran etexilate, an anticoagulant marketed under the brand name Pradaxa. Unlike warfarin, Pradaxa requires no dietary restrictions and was approved for use without blood monitoring or dose titration. In November, 2010, Fierstein met with the decedent and recommended switching from warfarin to Pradaxa. Fierstein testified at trial that the decedent had been tolerating warfarin well and that he had recommended the switch “out of convenience.” The decedent agreed and, for some time, took Pradaxa without any significant side effects.

On March 5, 2014, the decedent suffered a severe gastrointestinal bleed and was admitted to a hospital. The decedent underwent kidney dialysis to remove Pradaxa from her blood and was administered multiple blood transfusions. Although the bleeding stopped three days later, the decedent’s kidneys began to fail. On March 25, 2014, the decedent died. The death certificate lists “[a]cute [k]idney [i]njury,” “chronic kidney [d]isease,” “[r]etroperitoneal [f]ibrosis,” and “occult neoplasia” as causes of death.<sup>3</sup> The death certificate also lists “[d]abi-

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<sup>2</sup> Stanley Schneller, a cardiologist, testified at trial that “below [the accepted therapeutic] range [patients] don’t get any benefit, it’s as if they’re not taking the drug, and above that range [patients] get no further benefit in terms of stroke prevention.” Thus, Schneller testified, the “targeted range is designed to give [patients] stroke protection without undue bleeding risk.” Fierstein testified that the decedent was inside of the accepted therapeutic range “at least 75 percent of the time” she was taking warfarin.

<sup>3</sup> According to testimony offered at trial, retroperitoneal fibrosis is a medical condition that can cause kidney damage by obstructing the flow of urine. This condition was not related to the decedent’s use of Pradaxa. The phrase “occult neoplasia” denoted an undiagnosed cancer.

552

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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gatan [i]nduced [c]oagulopathy” and “gastrointestinal bleed” as “significant” conditions contributing to the decedent’s death. (Emphasis omitted.) No autopsy was performed.

The plaintiff subsequently commenced the present action, alleging, inter alia, that (1) the defendants negligently failed to give adequate warnings, directions, and instructions to guard against the risk of bleeding caused by Pradaxa, (2) the defendants negligently failed to test, study, and investigate the benefits of establishing a therapeutic range for Pradaxa, and (3) Pradaxa was defectively designed due to the absence of a reversal agent. On January 24, 2018, the trial court granted the defendants’ motion for summary judgment on the claim relating to the absence of a reversal agent, concluding, among other things, that it was preempted by federal law.<sup>4</sup>

The plaintiff filed a pretrial motion asking the trial court to instruct the jury that the defendants had improperly failed to maintain certain relevant materials for the purpose of discovery. Specifically, the plaintiff claimed that the defendants had lost or destroyed files of one of its former employees, Dr. Thorsten Lehr, while litigating previous federal actions relating to Pradaxa. The trial court, applying the test set forth in *Beers v. Bayliner Marine Corp.*, 236 Conn. 769, 777–79, 675 A.2d 829 (1996), concluded that a spoliation instruction was warranted and, over the defendants’ objection, provided such an instruction to the jury at the end of the trial. See footnote 6 of this opinion.

The jury returned a verdict, finding that, although the defendants had negligently failed to give adequate warnings, directions, and instructions to guard against

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<sup>4</sup> The judgment file incorrectly notes that the defendants’ various motions for summary judgment were denied in their entirety. This appears to have been a scrivener’s error.

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

553

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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the risk of bleeding caused by Pradaxa, the plaintiff had failed to prove that the defendants' wrongful conduct caused the decedent's death. The trial court subsequently rendered judgment in favor of the defendants, from which the plaintiff appealed. Additional facts and procedural history will be set forth as necessary.

## I

The plaintiff first claims that the trial court improperly precluded certain evidence and arguments related to the issue of spoliation.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the plaintiff posits that the absence of such information deprived the jury of the context necessary to decide whether to draw an adverse inference against the defendants, as permitted by the trial court's spoliation instruction. In response, the defendants argue that the trial court's limitations in this regard were proper.<sup>6</sup> For the reasons

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<sup>5</sup>The plaintiff also makes the conclusory assertion that the trial court's rulings with respect to spoliation "would seem to violate basic notions of fundamental fairness, due process, and the right to counsel." The plaintiff's brief, however, contains no analysis applying those constitutional principles to the facts of the present case. As a result, we deem those claims, insofar as they were raised, to have been abandoned. *Connecticut Light & Power Co. v. Gilmore*, 289 Conn. 88, 124, 956 A.2d 1145 (2008) ("We repeatedly have stated that [w]e are not required to review issues that have been improperly presented to this court through an inadequate brief. . . . Analysis, rather than mere abstract assertion, is required in order to avoid abandoning an issue by failure to brief the issue properly." [Internal quotation marks omitted.]).

<sup>6</sup>The defendants argue that the trial court's decision to give a spoliation instruction was, itself, improper. Because the defendants prevailed at trial, we decline to address that claim of error in the present appeal. See Practice Book § 61-1; see also *Seymour v. Seymour*, 262 Conn. 107, 110, 809 A.2d 1114 (2002) ("[o]rdinarily, a party that prevails in the trial court is not aggrieved"). We note, however, that other trial courts overseeing Pradaxa trials in this state have adopted divergent approaches to this issue. See *Bedssole v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*, Superior Court, judicial district of Hartford, Docket No. CV-16-6070289-S (September 14, 2018) (68 Conn. L. Rptr. 206) (declining to provide adverse inference instruction); *Gallam v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*, Superior Court, judicial district of Hartford, Docket No. CV-16-6067874-S (April 13, 2018) (following trial court's approach in present case, but also giving spoliation instruction during presentation of evidence); see also *In re Petition of*

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Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

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that follow, we decline to conclude that the trial court abused its discretion by precluding evidence and arguments relating to the issue of spoliation in the present case.

The following additional facts and procedural history are relevant to our consideration of this claim. In 2012, certain federal litigation relating to Pradaxa was centralized in the Southern District of Illinois pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1407, and a federal district court judge, David R. Herndon, was appointed to preside. *In re Pradaxa (Dabigatran Etexilate) Products Liability Litigation*, 883 F. Supp. 2d 1355, 1355–56 (J.P.M.L. 2012). Various discovery disputes in that consolidated federal litigation led to motions seeking sanctions against the defendants. See *In re Pradaxa (Dabigatran Etexilate) Products Liability Litigation*, Docket No. 3:12-MD-02385 (DRH), 2013 WL 6486921, \*1 (S.D. Ill. December 9, 2013).

As a result of those disputes, on September 18, 2013, Judge Herndon issued a mandatory injunction requiring the defendants to conduct “an immediate search for any yet undisclosed materials . . . .” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Id.*, \*3–5. During a subsequent deposition, the plaintiffs in that proceeding discovered that Lehr was a potentially relevant source of additional information and, as a result, requested production of his custodial file. *Id.*, \*9. Approximately one month after that deposition, the defendants informed Judge Herndon that Lehr had not been identified as a custodian and that, as a result, some of his documents and files had been destroyed. *Id.*

In reviewing a subsequent motion for sanctions, Judge Herndon found that Lehr “was a prominent scientist . . . that played a vital role in researching Pradaxa,” that the defendants were familiar with his work,

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*Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*, 745 F.3d 216, 220 (7th Cir. 2014) (noting wide range of sanctions available to district court).

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

555

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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and that the evidence on record in that case would “lead a reasonable person to infer a motive for the defendant[s] to abstain from placing a litigation hold on [Lehr’s] materials . . . .” *Id.*, \*12. On the basis of these findings, the court concluded that the defendants had failed to maintain Lehr’s files “in bad faith.”<sup>7</sup> *Id.*, \*18. This conduct, together with certain other discovery violations, led Judge Herndon to impose immediate sanctions on the defendants, including a substantial monetary fine and an order compelling the attendance of various corporate employees at depositions in the United States. *Id.*, \*20. In a separate ruling, Judge Herndon also specifically put the defendants on notice that additional sanctions, including an adverse inference instruction, would be considered at the close of discovery and would “apply to any actions pending before [that] court at [that] time . . . .” *In re Pradaxa (Dabigatran Etexilate) Products Liability Litigation*, United States District Court, Docket No. 3:12-MD-02385 (DRH), MDL No. 2385, CMO 50-1 (S.D. Ill. December 18, 2013), available at <https://www.ilsd.uscourts.gov/Documents/mdl2385/cmo50-1.pdf> (last visited May 1, 2020). The defendants challenged Judge Herndon’s order by filing a petition for a writ of mandamus in the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. *In re Petition of Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*, 745 F.3d 216–17 (7th Cir. 2014). In that proceeding, the Seventh Cir-

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<sup>7</sup> Prior to 2015, there was a split in federal courts regarding the factual findings necessary to support an imposition of sanctions, such as an adverse inference instruction, for the spoliation of electronically stored information; some courts imposed sanctions on a finding a gross negligence, while others required intentional destruction. Compare *Residential Funding Corp. v. DeGeorge Financial Corp.*, 306 F.3d 99, 99–101 (2d Cir. 2002) (gross negligence standard), and *Bracey v. Grondin*, 712 F.3d 1012, 1020 (7th Cir. 2013) (bad faith standard). The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure were ultimately amended in 2015 to require a finding of bad faith. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 37 (e) (2) (permitting imposition of sanctions “only upon finding that the party acted with the intent to deprive another party of the information’s use in the litigation”).

556

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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cuit concluded that the order compelling the deposition of corporate employees in the United States was improper. *Id.*, 219–20. In reaching this conclusion, the Seventh Circuit expressly declined to revisit the factual findings underlying the District Court’s finding of bad faith and its imposition of other sanctions. *Id.*, 218. Following Judge Herndon’s decision, the consolidated federal litigation settled. See *In re Pradaxa (Dabigatran Etxilate) Products Liability Litigation*, United States District Court, Docket No. 3:12-MD-02385 (DRH) (S.D. Ill. May 1, 2015), available at <https://www.ilsd.uscourts.gov/documents/mdl2385/MinuteOrder656.pdf> (last visited May 1, 2020).

Notwithstanding the resolution of the consolidated federal litigation, several cases related to Pradaxa remained pending in this state. Those cases were placed onto a single, consolidated docket governed by a series of case management orders. See *In re Connecticut Pradaxa Litigation*, judicial district of Hartford, Complex Litigation Docket, Docket No. HHD-CV-13-5036974S. The trial court in the present case noted that, under one such order dated July 23, 2015, “all discovery propounded and completed in the [consolidated federal litigation was] deemed propounded and responded to for purposes of [Connecticut’s consolidated Pradaxa litigation] docket . . . .” That order, which the parties agreed to be bound by, required the defendants to provide the plaintiff with all evidence produced during the course of the consolidated federal litigation, and provided that all discovery requests and responses in that proceeding “shall be deem[ed] served in this court for purposes of the parties’ respective rights and obligations with regard thereto.”

On January 5, 2018, the plaintiff filed a pretrial request to charge, requesting a spoliation charge relating to, among other things, the defendants’ failure to maintain



335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

557

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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Lehr's files.<sup>8</sup> Relying principally on Judge Herndon's finding of bad faith, the plaintiff requested an instruction indicating that the elements of spoliation had been met as a matter of law. The defendants objected, and the trial court heard oral argument on January 29, 2018. During oral argument, the plaintiff argued that the presentation of evidence relating to spoliation would be "time-consuming" and "extraordinarily difficult" to put in context.<sup>9</sup> The plaintiff indicated that such an endeavor would be an unnecessary "sideshow" that would waste both time and judicial resources. On several occasions, the plaintiff represented that she would not seek to introduce such evidence, if the court were to conclude, at the outset of the trial, that she was entitled to the requested instruction.<sup>10</sup>

The court then asked the plaintiff the following specific question: "[I]f the court granted the requested charge and you didn't put on any evidence of Judge Herndon's order, et cetera, how would the jury be equipped to determine whether to draw an adverse inference? As . . . you know, it's not mandatory." In response, the plaintiff stated that the instruction itself

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<sup>8</sup> The plaintiff also requested instructions relating to the destruction of certain text messages and corporate e-mails. Those aspects of the plaintiff's request to charge are not at issue in the present appeal.

<sup>9</sup> The plaintiff noted, in particular, that such evidence would likely require calling one of the defendants' attorneys, Eric Hudson, as a witness.

<sup>10</sup> During oral argument, the plaintiff implied that the introduction of such evidence could be avoided at least three times. On one occasion, the plaintiff stated that, "if the court doesn't grant this motion, then [she] intend[s] to put on evidence that there was a prior proceeding in which [the defendants] were obligated to preserve this information and they failed to do so." On another occasion, the court asked the plaintiff the following question: "So your position is that if the court were to grant the request for a spoliation charge, you would not intend to put on any evidence of Judge Herndon's order?" The plaintiff responded by stating: "That's correct." Finally, the plaintiff concluded her argument on as follows: "We believe that the motion should be granted for the reasons we've articulated, but if the court denies it, we'd ask that it be denied with direction that we be permitted to put on the evidence as we've discussed here today."

558

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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would inform the jury of her claim that the defendants had “intentionally . . . or recklessly lost or destroyed” documents, including files from Lehr, that were relevant “to the issues of the benefits of assessing and adjusting Pradaxa dosing based on blood concentrations . . . .” The plaintiff asserted that, armed with such an instruction and testimony from various witnesses discussing Lehr, the jury “would be able to put [the spoliation issue] in context.”<sup>11</sup>

On February 18, 2018, in a comprehensive, written decision,<sup>12</sup> the trial court granted the plaintiff’s request for a spoliation charge, finding that, in light of the proceedings before Judge Herndon, the plaintiff had satisfied the elements of spoliation set forth in *Beers* as a matter of law and was entitled to a jury instruction to that effect.<sup>13</sup> In so doing, the court noted: “The parties agreed to be bound by, and not duplicate, the discovery process that had occurred in the [consolidated federal litigation]. It necessarily follows that an offending party who failed to identify a custodian of potentially relevant evidence and who failed to preserve such evidence in the underlying proceeding should also be bound by any judicial findings by the underlying court relating to such discovery failures. The contention that Judge Herndon’s discovery related findings should be ignored altogether smacks of unfairness under the very unusual circumstances of the discovery process in [Connecticut’s con-

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<sup>11</sup> During a supplemental oral argument before the trial court, the plaintiff repeated her belief that the jury could be provided with an adequate context through evidence regarding Lehr’s involvement in the research underlying Pradaxa and, specifically, the concept of a therapeutic range.

<sup>12</sup> The trial court’s written decision summarized the proceedings related to spoliation sanctions before Judge Herndon, including the relevant factual findings and conclusions.

<sup>13</sup> As noted subsequently in this opinion, the ultimate question of whether to draw an adverse inference was reserved for the jury. See, e.g., *Paylan v. St. Mary’s Hospital Corp.*, 118 Conn. App. 258, 264, 983 A.2d 56 (2009); see also Connecticut Civil Jury Instructions (2012) § 2.3-4, available at <https://jud.ct.gov/JI/Civil/Civil.pdf> (last visited May 1, 2020).

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

559

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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solidated Pradaxa litigation] docket.” The court then concluded that the “relitigation of the spoliation issues relating to . . . Lehr . . . would . . . offend principles of judicial economy, would create a trial within a trial, would risk one or more trial counsel being called as witnesses, and would create possible, if not inevitable, confusion with the jury, who would be presented with testimony and other evidence (e.g., court orders, among other things) relating to the [consolidated federal litigation].” See footnote 6 of this opinion.

The following day, the trial court granted a motion in limine filed by the defendants seeking to exclude “‘evidence, testimony, or argument regarding alleged spoliation issues’” relating to Lehr.<sup>14</sup> The trial court based its decision on the plaintiff’s previous representations that such issues would not need to be presented to the jury if the court granted, as it did, her request for a spoliation charge.

On February 23, 2018, the plaintiff filed a motion asking the court to issue the instruction on spoliation at the commencement of trial. In that motion, the plaintiff also sought permission to “inform the jury during opening, at trial, and during closing argument of [the defendants’] unlawful destruction of critically important evidence . . . .” On that same day, the defendants objected, and the trial court heard oral argument. The court ruled that references to spoliation during opening statements risked unfair prejudice to the defendants and, accordingly, exercised its discretion to proscribe

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<sup>14</sup> The plaintiff’s written objection to the defendant’s motion in limine reiterated her position that she would seek to introduce evidence relating to spoliation only in the event the trial court declined to give the requested instruction. The plaintiff argued, specifically, that “in the event that the spoliation issues addressed by Judge Herndon’s orders are to be relitigated in this case, then [the] plaintiff believes that the court should admit as full exhibits [the various court orders] reflecting Judge Herndon’s identification of the discovery orders, [the] bad faith conduct in breaching same, and the consequences of that conduct.”

560

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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such references. See Practice Book § 15-6. The trial court also made clear that, although the plaintiff was free to discuss Lehr's importance to the case generally, information relating to the "destruction" of documents could not be communicated to the jury during the evidentiary portion of the trial in the absence of a witness with personal knowledge of that event.<sup>15</sup> The trial court noted that the sanction the plaintiff had procured was powerful. The court was particularly concerned about the use by the plaintiff's counsel of the terms "sanction" or "bad faith" because, "although [it] found as a matter of law that Judge Herndon's findings satisfies *Beers*, he made findings that go beyond *Beers* and so he made a bad faith finding that is not necessary under *Beers*." (Internal quotation marks omitted.) Finally, the trial court expressly reserved decision on whether arguments relating to spoliation would be permitted in closing, noting that it had not yet determined whether it would give the adverse inference instruction when evidence relating to Lehr was admitted during trial, or after closing arguments.

Lehr's involvement in the development of Pradaxa featured prominently at trial. In his opening statement, the plaintiff's counsel told the jury that the defendants had an interest in suppressing scientific information showing a "therapeutic range" for Pradaxa because frequent blood testing would place that product at a competitive disadvantage. The plaintiff's counsel noted, in particular, that the defendants had pressured one of their own scientists, Paul Reilly, to remove such infor-

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<sup>15</sup> Although conceding that the scheduled witnesses lacked such personal knowledge, the plaintiff did indicate to the trial court that a particular corporate e-mail had identified Lehr as the "father" of a manuscript relating to dabigatran etexilate exposure, and that expert witnesses who had reviewed the materials produced by the defendants could testify that they had been unable to locate any version of that manuscript authored by Lehr. As discussed subsequently in this opinion, testimony to this effect was, in fact, ultimately presented to the jury.

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

561

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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mation from a manuscript relating to dabigatran etexilate exposure. The plaintiff's counsel indicated that certain corporate documents had identified Lehr as the "father" of that same manuscript and that Reilly had simply continued Lehr's work.<sup>16</sup> The plaintiff's counsel then urged the jury to "pay close attention to the paper and how it developed."<sup>17</sup>

One of the plaintiff's expert witnesses, a pharmacologist named Laura Plunkett, opined during her testimony that blood monitoring should have been required for Pradaxa because, like warfarin, Pradaxa has a particular therapeutic range that balances the various risks posed by clots and bleeds. She based her opinion, in part, on information contained in Reilly's exposure response paper. Plunkett then testified that she had reviewed various communications about the exposure response paper and that, in her opinion, important scientific information demonstrating a specific therapeutic range had been suppressed by the defendants in order to avoid the need for blood monitoring.<sup>18</sup> Finally, Plunkett testified, over the defendants' objection, that she had

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<sup>16</sup> The published version of that paper, which was admitted into evidence as a full exhibit, lists both Reilly and Lehr as authors, and indicates that both Reilly and Lehr "contributed equally."

<sup>17</sup> The plaintiff's opening statement was accompanied by various slides that were shown to the jury. One such slide read as follows: "We do not have the first version of the Pradaxa paper."

<sup>18</sup> In one e-mail, Reilly writes that, "I am aware that the conclusions that appear to emerge from this paper are not the ones currently wished for by marketing (that dose adjustment will optimize therapy) . . . ." In a separate string of e-mails discussing specific upper and lower blood concentration measurements, Reilly notes that he has "been facing heavy resistance internally on this paper about the concept of a therapeutic range, at least stating it outright." In certain other communications discussing the need for blood monitoring with Pradaxa in specific populations, Andreas Clemens, the head of the department of medical affairs for dabigatran etexilate, wrote as follows: "This needs [to be] a TelCon and we should NOT interact via e-mail on this." All of this correspondence was admitted into evidence and placed before the jury for consideration.

562 NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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looked for the first draft of the exposure response paper and had been unable to find that document.<sup>19</sup>

Our review of the record indicates that, over the course of the nearly three weeks of trial that followed, there was only one particular instance in which the plaintiff proffered, and the trial court excluded, testimony directly relating to the destruction of Lehr's files. On that occasion, the plaintiff sought to introduce an excerpt from a deposition of Andreas Barner, the defendants' chairman of corporate management, relating generally to his awareness of the defendants' failure to preserve Lehr's computer. The plaintiff argued that this excerpt would provide "bread crumbs" to assist the jury in determining whether to draw an adverse inference against the defendants. The trial court, however, precluded admission of that excerpt, concluding that the information fell "squarely within" its previous rulings related to spoliation and the adverse inference instruction.

On the final day of the plaintiff's case-in-chief, the defendants filed a motion seeking reconsideration of the court's previous decision to charge the jury on the issue of spoliation. In that motion, the defendants argued, *inter alia*, that the plaintiff's factual basis for requesting a spoliation charge had been undercut at trial. See footnote 19 of this opinion. The plaintiff objected, arguing that the evidence presented to the jury did not undermine the requested charge. The plaintiff further claimed that, even if evidence of spoliation was lacking, precluding the charge on that ground would be improper in light of the fact that the trial court had

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<sup>19</sup> The defendants sought to undercut this testimony on recross-examination by introducing a version of the exposure response paper that *Reilly* had characterized in an e-mail as the "first draft." Plunkett later testified that she had specifically attempted to locate an earlier version of that paper from *Lehr* in light of an e-mail that identified Lehr as the "father" of the manuscript.

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

563

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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excluded evidence of spoliation during trial. The plaintiff noted that the trial court's "carefully tailored spoliation charge is an appropriate sanction for [the defendants'] wrongful conduct." The trial court denied the defendants' motion.<sup>20</sup>

The defendants subsequently called Reilly as a witness during their case-in-chief. During that testimony, Reilly described the defendants' efforts to evaluate blood concentration data, stating that the exposure response paper had "gone through . . . multiple iterations" and that Lehr had "initiated . . . dose titration modeling to see whether . . . he could identify a target range of dabigatran and a target dose adjustment." Reilly testified that, despite their best efforts, the defendants had not been able to identify a particular therapeutic range for Pradaxa and, had such a range been established, it would have been communicated to physicians. Reilly then indicated that the FDA and the scientific community had reached the same consensus.

On cross-examination, the plaintiff's counsel questioned Reilly about a specific e-mail in which Andreas Clemens, the head of the department of medical affairs for dabigatran etexilate, referred to Lehr as the "father" of the exposure response paper. (Internal quotation marks omitted.) That correspondence, which was admitted into evidence as a full exhibit, indicates that Reilly "took [that paper] over and changed it significantly." In response, Reilly testified that he was personally unaware of any drafts of the exposure response paper prior to his own and that Clemens had been "sadly

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<sup>20</sup> During oral argument on the defendants' motion for reconsideration, the plaintiff stated as follows: "[W]e wanted the record to be clear that [the] plaintiff has understood the court's instruction regarding the spoliation charge was that the plaintiff would not be offering evidence during the course of its case as to issues of spoliation or suppression of documents. . . . [T]o the extent that the court entertains the motion to [reconsider], we [do] not want to waive the right to put on such evidence by resting . . ."

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564 NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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misinformed.” See also footnotes 15 and 19 of this opinion.

Following the close of evidence, the plaintiff again requested permission to inform the jury during closing argument of the defendants’ spoliation and the impact it had on the present case. Without such information, the plaintiff argued, the jury would lack the context necessary to draw the adverse inference invited by the court’s instruction. The plaintiff, however, did not proffer the substance of the new or additional information relating to spoliation that she wanted to use in closing argument. Rather, she again referenced Lehr’s general importance to the development of Pradaxa and his involvement with the exposure response paper. The trial court ruled that the issue of spoliation would not be “fodder for closing argument” but expressly noted that the parties were free to “mention what [had] already come into evidence . . . .”

The plaintiff’s closing argument, in fact, discussed the evidence relating to Lehr at length. Specifically, the plaintiff’s counsel repeated the argument that the defendants had sought to suppress information relating to a therapeutic range for Pradaxa because blood monitoring would put their product at a competitive disadvantage. The plaintiff’s counsel emphasized that the authors of the exposure response paper had explored the concept of blood monitoring, that Clemens’ e-mail implied the existence of an early draft manuscript authored by Lehr, and that such a manuscript had never been discovered.<sup>21</sup> Finally, the plaintiff’s counsel asked the jury to pay “close attention” to the trial court’s instructions relating to Lehr and to “be the judge” of whether such facts were important.

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<sup>21</sup> In response, the defendants posited during their closing argument that Reilly’s testimony, together with various documents and correspondence, had disproved the existence of such a draft.



335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

565

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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The trial court ultimately issued the following instruction to the jury relating to spoliation: “The plaintiff claims that certain evidence was not available to her because [the defendants] destroyed or failed to preserve it, at a time when it had a legal duty to preserve it. Specifically, [the defendants] destroyed or failed to preserve the desktop computer, laptop computer, Blackberry phone, and paper files of . . . Lehr, about whom there was some evidence during the trial, who was a scientist and employee of [the defendants and] who did research concerning Pradaxa until he left the company in September, 2012. The plaintiff contends such evidence is relevant to her claim concerning the benefits of assessing blood plasma concentrations. I instruct you that . . . Lehr’s desktop computer, laptop computer, Blackberry phone, and paper files were not preserved at a time when [the defendants were] on notice of a legal duty to preserve them and that the failure to retain such files was intentional, in the sense that it was not inadvertent. Our law allows you to draw an adverse inference that the destroyed evidence would have been unfavorable to [the defendants]. You may therefore draw an inference that the evidence that was destroyed or not preserved would be unfavorable to [the defendants], but you are not required to do so. Understand that this is not a claim for which you would award damages; rather, it permits an adverse inference to be drawn as you consider all the evidence relating to the plaintiff’s claims. If you choose to draw such an inference, you may not use the inference to supply the place of evidence of material facts or to shift the burden of proof from the plaintiff to [the defendants] on the plaintiff’s claims, but it may turn the scale when the evidence is closely balanced. By giving you this instruction, the court does not mean to place emphasis on this issue versus any other aspect of the evidence that you may consider, and the court takes no view as to whether

566

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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such an inference should be drawn, as that decision is for you, the jury, to decide.”<sup>22</sup>

Following the jury’s verdict in favor of the defendants, the plaintiff filed a motion to set aside the verdict, claiming, among other things, that the trial court had “improperly prevented [her] from informing the jury of [the defendants’] acts of spoliation and the court’s sanction regarding the same.” The plaintiff argued that the issue of spoliation was itself relevant and probative to the defendants’ reckless disregard for consumer safety. She renewed her claim that the trial court’s restrictions on opening statements, the admission of evidence, and closing arguments prevented her from providing the jury with the context necessary to decide whether to draw an adverse inference against the defendants. The trial court found this claim to be “wholly without merit” because the plaintiff, in seeking an instruction, expressly represented that evidence relating to spoliation would not need to be presented at trial. Relying in part on the induced error doctrine, the trial court denied the motion, concluding that the plaintiff had found “purported error in the very approach for which she successfully advocated.”

We begin by noting the standard of review and the general principles of law applicable to the plaintiff’s claim. “The trial court possesses inherent discretionary powers to control proceedings, exclude evidence, and prevent occurrences that might unnecessarily prejudice the right of any party to a fair trial.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Downs v. Trias*, 306 Conn. 81, 102, 49 A.3d 180 (2012). We review the relevant rulings of the trial court in the present case for an abuse of that discretion. See, e.g., *McBurney v. Paquin*, 302 Conn.

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<sup>22</sup> The plaintiff does not claim in the present appeal that the content of the trial court’s ultimate instruction deviated in any material respect from her request.

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

567

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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359, 378, 28 A.3d 272 (2011) (“[t]he trial court’s ruling on evidentiary matters will be overturned only upon a showing of a clear abuse of the court’s discretion” (internal quotation marks omitted)); *Naughton v. Hager*, 29 Conn. App. 181, 188, 614 A.2d 852, (“[t]he trial court is vested with broad discretion over the latitude of the statements of counsel during argument”), cert. denied, 224 Conn. 920, 618 A.2d 527 (1992).<sup>23</sup> In applying that standard, “[w]e [must] make every reasonable presumption in favor of upholding the trial court’s ruling, and only upset it for a manifest abuse of discretion. . . . [Thus, our] review of such rulings is limited to the questions of whether the trial court correctly applied the law and reasonably could have reached the conclusion that it did.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Filippelli v. Saint Mary’s Hospital*, 319 Conn. 113, 119, 124 A.3d 501 (2015).

We agree with the trial court’s assessment that the present case implicates the doctrine of induced error. “[T]he term induced error, or invited error, has been defined as [a]n error that a party cannot complain of on appeal because the party, through conduct, encouraged or prompted the trial court to make the [allegedly] erroneous ruling. . . . It is well established that a party who induces an error cannot be heard to later complain about that error. . . . This principle bars appellate review of induced nonconstitutional error and induced

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<sup>23</sup> The plaintiff argues that, in light of the trial court’s decision to instruct the jury on spoliation, its decision to “preclude counsel from commenting [on that issue] in any manner” should be reviewed de novo. We disagree for two reasons. First, as set forth previously in this opinion, the plaintiff was permitted to introduce evidence regarding Lehr’s research and his involvement with the exposure response paper. Second, to the extent that the plaintiff assails the scope of the remedy ultimately fashioned, we note that the imposition of sanctions for discovery misconduct is also vested in the sound discretion of the trial court. See, e.g., *Ridgaway v. Mount Vernon Fire Ins. Co.*, 328 Conn. 60, 70, 176 A.3d 1167 (2018); *Duncan v. Mill Management Co. of Greenwich, Inc.*, 308 Conn. 1, 28, 60 A.3d 222 (2013).

568

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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constitutional error. . . . The invited error doctrine rests [on principles] of fairness, both to the trial court and to the opposing party. . . . [W]hether we call it induced error, encouraged error, waiver, or abandonment, the result—that the . . . claim is unreviewable—is the same.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Independent Party of CT—State Central v. Merrill*, 330 Conn. 681, 724, 200 A.3d 1118 (2019); see also *State v. Fay*, 326 Conn. 742, 765 n.22, 167 A.3d 897 (2017) (“a finding of induced error is supportable when a party’s claim on appeal will result in an inappropriate ambush of the trial court”). With these standards in mind, we turn to the trial court’s rulings in the present case.

Our review of the record leads us to conclude that the doctrine of induced error precludes the plaintiff from claiming that the trial court improperly excluded opening statements and evidence relating to spoliation. In response to the plaintiff’s pretrial request for an adverse inference instruction, the court specifically asked the plaintiff how the jury would be able to decide whether to draw such an inference without any evidence relating to the underlying conduct. The plaintiff not only represented to the trial court that the requested instruction would obviate the need for such evidence; see footnote 10 of this opinion; but also indicated that the instruction itself, together with evidence generally relating to Lehr’s involvement in the development of Pradaxa, would adequately equip the jury with the information it would need to draw an adverse inference against the defendants.

The trial court afforded the plaintiff broad latitude to introduce evidence and testimony describing the nature of Lehr’s work, his research regarding the possible existence of a therapeutic range, and the scope of his involvement in the exposure response paper. The plaintiff used the testimony proffered by Plunkett and Reilly, in particular, to develop a detailed theory that

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

569

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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Lehr had authored an early version of the exposure response paper that the defendants had never produced. The trial court's instruction clearly stated that the defendants had failed to preserve Lehr's files despite having a legal duty to do so, and that the jury could choose to infer that the information in those files would have been adverse to the defendants. Having encouraged the trial court to structure the proceeding in this precise manner, the plaintiff cannot now prevail on the ground that opening statements and evidence informing the jury about the defendants' destruction of Lehr's files was, in fact, *necessary* to put the requested instruction in an appropriate context. Cf. *Ferri v. Powell-Ferri*, 317 Conn. 223, 236–37, 116 A.3d 297 (2015) (“Our rules of procedure do not allow a [party] to pursue one course of action at trial and later, on appeal, argue that a path he rejected should now be open to him. . . . To rule otherwise would permit trial by ambush.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.)).

Reaching the opposite conclusion would substantially undercut the grounds on which the trial court concluded that the plaintiff's requested instruction was appropriate in the first instance, including improving judicial economy, avoiding a trial within a trial, and preventing confusion of the jurors. The trial court's decision to exclude the deposition testimony relating to Barner's knowledge regarding the destruction of Lehr's computer demonstrates this point. If the plaintiff had been permitted to lay a trail of “bread crumbs” for the jury using that testimony, the defendants would have been entitled to marshal any admissible evidence showing that this same trail should not be followed. Presenting such a dispute to the jury would necessitate the very “sideshow” that the plaintiff had purposefully forgone in requesting a spoliation instruction before the outset of trial.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The trial court's exclusion of Barner's deposition testimony, like its pretrial ruling on the defendants' motion in limine, placed the plaintiff on

570 NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

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Our conclusion that the trial court did not abuse its discretion by declining to admit evidence that could have initially been presented at a sanctions hearing also resolves, in large measure, the plaintiff's claims relating to the restrictions that the court imposed on closing arguments. As this court has previously noted, a trial court acts well within its broad discretion when it restricts the scope of an argument "to prevent comment on facts that are not properly in evidence . . . ." (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Jackson v. Water Pollution Control Authority*, 278 Conn. 692, 713, 900 A.2d 498 (2006); cf. *State v. Weatherspoon*, 332 Conn. 531, 551, 212 A.3d 208 (2019) ("[w]hile the privilege of counsel in addressing the jury should not be too closely narrowed or unduly hampered, it must never be used as a license to state, or to comment [on], or to suggest an inference from, facts not in evidence" (internal quotation marks omitted)); *State v. Lopez*, 280 Conn. 779, 803, 911 A.2d 1099 (2007) ("Counsel may comment [on] facts properly in evidence and [on] reasonable inferences to be drawn from them. . . . Counsel may not, however, comment on or suggest an inference from facts not in evidence." (Internal quotation marks omitted.)).<sup>25</sup> Because the trial court ruled at the outset that evidence relating to the conduct underlying Judge Herndon's finding of bad faith would not be admitted or presented to the jury, we agree with the trial court's assessment that such evidence was not proper "fodder" for arguments by counsel.

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notice that the trial court intended to hold her to the representations she had made in requesting an adverse inference instruction. If the plaintiff believed that the instruction she had requested could not properly be considered in the absence of Barner's testimony, she could have withdrawn her request for the charge and sought to introduce evidence to prove the elements of spoliation under *Beers*. The plaintiff did not do so. See also footnote 26 of this opinion.

<sup>25</sup> We note that this well established legal principle also undercuts the plaintiff's claim that the trial court's restriction on closing arguments was unforeseeable.

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

571

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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We note that the plaintiff was not compelled to seek the benefit of the findings made by Judge Herndon, or to request an adverse inference instruction as a matter of law. The plaintiff could have, for example, asked the trial court to independently review the evidence relating to the destruction of Lehr's files and, as is typically the case, argued that any evidence ultimately admitted at trial supported a corresponding instruction.<sup>26</sup> See *Paylan v. St. Mary's Hospital Corp.*, 118 Conn. App. 258, 264, 983 A.2d 56 (2009) (discussing whether plaintiff adduced sufficient evidence at trial to warrant spoliation instruction under *Beers*). The plaintiff could have also chosen to pursue still other sanctions available for discovery misconduct under our rules of practice. See Practice Book § 13-14. The plaintiff, as a matter of strategy, chose a different path.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, we decline to conclude that the trial court abused its discretion by precluding evidence and arguments relating to spoliation in the present case.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The plaintiff also did not seek to revert to such a procedure after the trial court granted the defendants' motion in limine and denied her motion for permission to "inform" the jury of the issues relating to spoliation. Both of those rulings, which were issued before the commencement of trial, clearly indicated that the court intended to severely restrict, if not entirely preclude, evidence and arguments relating to the defendants' destruction of Lehr's files.

<sup>27</sup> The plaintiff raises two ancillary arguments warranting brief attention. First, the plaintiff argues that the trial court's decision to instruct the jury that an adverse inference was permissible as a matter of law merely relieved her of the burden of proving spoliation. That ruling, the plaintiff argues, should have done nothing to prevent her from informing the jury of the defendants' unlawful destruction of evidence. This argument ignores the fact that presenting such evidence to the jury would necessitate the very same "trial within a trial" that the court's decision to give an adverse inference instruction was, itself, expressly designed to avoid. Second, the plaintiff argues that the restrictions imposed by the trial court run contrary to a "strong public policy . . . of seeking to deter spoliation by product liability defendants." We find this argument unpersuasive because the trial court, in fact, granted the plaintiff's requested form of relief for spoliation in the present case.

<sup>28</sup> This conclusion is a relatively narrow one. This case does not require this court to determine whether a spoliation instruction was required, or

572 NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

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## II

The plaintiff next claims that the trial court improperly excluded certain portions of a video recorded deposition of Christopher Corsico, the defendants' senior vice president for clinical development, from her case on rebuttal. The defendants respond by arguing, *inter alia*, that the trial court's ruling was correct because the proffered testimony did not contradict testimony presented by their expert witnesses. We agree with the defendants.

The following additional facts are relevant to our discussion of this claim. During their case-in-chief, the defendants called two expert witnesses, Stanley Schneller, a cardiologist, and Michelle Anderson, a gastroenterologist, to testify on the issue of causation. Schneller testified that the decedent's gastrointestinal bleed had resolved three days after she arrived at the hospital and that a "multiplicity of other coexisting medical problem[s]" had caused her death. Specifically, Schneller testified that "acute kidney injury, chronic kidney disease, retroperitoneal fibrosis, and occult neoplasia" directly caused the decedent's death, and that those conditions were unrelated to her use of Pradaxa or her gastrointestinal bleed. See footnote 3 of this opinion. Anderson's testimony supported the same conclusion.

After the defendants rested, the plaintiff sought to introduce, as rebuttal, a brief segment from Corsico's February, 2014 video recorded deposition. During that deposition, Corsico was asked: "[D]o you understand that there can be a series or a cascade of events that

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whether the instruction ultimately provided to the jury was proper. See footnote 6 of this opinion. Simply put, we only conclude that, in light of the representations made to the trial court in seeking an instruction in the present case, the plaintiff cannot prevail on her claim that the trial court improperly precluded evidence and arguments related to spoliation.



335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

573

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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can ultimately lead to one's demise that may be precipitated by a gastrointestinal bleed?" Corsico answered in the affirmative. The defendants' counsel objected, arguing that the admission of that testimony as rebuttal would be improper because it did not conflict with testimony from either Schneller or Anderson. In response, the plaintiff's counsel argued that Corsico's testimony undercut Schneller and Anderson's conclusion that, because the decedent's gastrointestinal bleed had stopped, it did not cause her death.

The trial court ultimately sustained the defendants' counsel's objection, aptly noting: "I just don't see how . . . Corsico's testimony . . . rebuts testimony by either . . . Schneller or . . . Anderson because . . . Corsico, in this [question and answer], was not specifically asked about a [gastrointestinal] bleed that had ended; nor were [either] Schneller [or] Anderson asked [whether it is] possible that a [gastrointestinal] bleed can lead to a cascade of events that ultimately led to one's death."

"It is well settled that the admission of rebuttal evidence lies within the sound discretion of the trial court." *Gomeau v. Gomeau*, 242 Conn. 202, 208, 698 A.2d 818 (1997); see also Practice Book § 15-5 (3). "The issue on appeal is not whether any one of us, sitting as the trial court, would have permitted the disputed testimony to be introduced. The question is rather whether the trial court . . . abused its discretion in not allowing the rebuttal testimony . . ." (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Id.*, 209. "[R]ebuttal evidence is that which refutes the evidence [already] presented . . . rather than that which merely bolsters one's case." (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *State v. Wood*, 208 Conn. 125, 139, 545 A.2d 1026, cert. denied, 488 U.S. 895, 109 S. Ct. 235, 102 L. Ed. 2d 225 (1988). "There is no requirement that a rebuttal witness must respond to every alternate theory offered by the defendant . . . a gen-

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Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

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eral contradiction of the testimony given by the defendant is considered permissible rebuttal testimony.”<sup>29</sup> *State v. Gray*, 221 Conn. 713, 728, 607 A.2d 391, cert. denied, 506 U.S. 872, 113 S. Ct. 207, 121 L. Ed. 2d 148 (1992); see also 1 K. Broun, McCormick on Evidence (7th Ed. 2013) § 4, p. 16 (“the plaintiff . . . is confined to testimony refuting the defense evidence, unless the trial judge in her discretion permits him to depart from the regular scope of rebuttal”).

We agree with the trial court’s conclusion that the proffered question and answer from Corsico’s deposition was not proper rebuttal because Corsico was not discussing a situation in which a person’s gastrointestinal bleed had resolved prior to his or her death. The isolated colloquy from Corsico’s deposition establishes only a single, generic proposition: that a gastrointestinal bleed can lead indirectly to death. Such a broad statement does not generally contradict Schneller’s and Anderson’s more precise testimony that, in this particular case, the decedent’s death was caused by other medical conditions and not the gastrointestinal bleed, which had resolved more than two weeks before her death.<sup>30</sup> In essence, the experts were asked different hypothetical questions, the answers to which were not necessarily contradictory.<sup>31</sup> As a result, we conclude

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<sup>29</sup> The plaintiff argues that the trial court’s ruling was based on the erroneous legal conclusion that rebuttal evidence must *directly* contradict testimony presented by the defendants. Our independent review of the record has, however, located no support for the contention that such a standard was applied in the present case.

<sup>30</sup> The plaintiff does not argue that she was prohibited from calling additional expert witnesses to rebut the testimony from Schneller and Anderson on either the decedent’s unrelated medical conditions or the results of the decedent’s gastrointestinal bleed.

<sup>31</sup> The plaintiff asserts that Corsico’s recognition that a gastrointestinal bleed can lead to a fatal cascade was relevant and, indeed, crucial to proving her case. Specifically, the plaintiff argues that such testimony (1) would have helped to bolster her own evidence on causation, (2) would have precluded the defendants from making certain arguments in closing, and (3) was clearly important in light of the jury’s ultimate verdict. None of these arguments, however, relate to whether the trial court erred by declining

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

575

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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that the trial court did not abuse its discretion by excluding Corsico's testimony from the plaintiff's case on rebuttal.

### III

The plaintiff's third claim is that the trial court improperly granted the defendants' motion for summary judgment on a design defect claim related to the defendants' failure to develop and market a reversal agent for Pradaxa, pursuant to the impossibility preemption doctrine. In response, the defendants assert that the trial court's preemption analysis was correct because marketing a reversal agent would have required independent approval by the FDA. We agree with the defendants.

The following additional facts and procedural history are relevant to our consideration of this claim. The FDA approved Pradaxa in 2010. Five years later, after the decedent's death, the defendants obtained approval from the FDA to sell idarucizumab, a chemical reversal agent for Pradaxa marketed under the brand name Praxbind. Because Praxbind was not available at the time of the decedent's gastrointestinal bleed, kidney dialysis was required to remove dabigatran etexilate, the active ingredient in Pradaxa, from her bloodstream. As a result, the decedent's gastrointestinal bleed took three days to stop.

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to admit Corsico's testimony *as rebuttal*. See, e.g., *DiMaio v. Panico*, 115 Conn. 295, 298, 161 A. 238 (1932) ("The rule upon this subject is a familiar one. When, by the pleadings, the burden of proving any matter in issue is thrown upon the plaintiff, he must, in the first instance, introduce all the evidence upon which he relies to establish his claim. He cannot, as said by Lord Ellenborough, go into half his case, and reserve the remainder." (Internal quotation marks omitted.)). Finally, the plaintiff argues that the trial court should have admitted Corsico's testimony because presentation of that evidence would not have taken much time. Although the trial court may well have been entitled to weigh that fact in reaching its decision; see *Gomeau v. Gomeau*, *supra*, 242 Conn. 211; we decline to find an abuse of discretion on that basis alone.

576 NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

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In the present case, the plaintiff sought to advance a claim that the defendants could have brought Praxbind to market earlier and that, because they did not do so, the decedent's gastrointestinal bleed was prolonged. The plaintiff claimed, in particular, that the defendants had defectively designed Pradaxa by failing to seek concurrent approval for a reversal agent. The defendants subsequently filed a motion for summary judgment, arguing that, because the FDA had not approved Praxbind before the decedent's death, the plaintiff was foreclosed from pursuing a design defect claim predicated on its absence. Specifically, the defendants argued that the reasoning set forth in *Mutual Pharmaceutical Co. v. Bartlett*, 570 U.S. 472, 133 S. Ct. 2466, 186 L. Ed. 2d 607 (2013), and *PLIVA, Inc. v. Mensing*, 564 U.S. 604, 131 S. Ct. 2567, 180 L. Ed. 2d 580 (2011), clearly established that such claims are preempted by federal law. The trial court reached the same conclusion and, accordingly, granted the defendants' motion for summary judgment on that claim.<sup>32</sup>

"The standard of review on summary judgment is well established. Summary judgment shall be rendered forthwith if the pleadings, affidavits and other proof submitted show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact and that the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. . . . The scope of our appellate review depends upon the proper characterization of the rulings made by the trial court. . . . When . . . the trial court draws conclusions of law, our review is plenary and we must decide whether its conclusions are legally and logically correct and find support in the facts that appear in the record." (Internal

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<sup>32</sup> The trial court also concluded that the defendants were also entitled to summary judgment on this claim because Praxbind was a "different product as a matter of law and not a design element of Pradaxa." Because we conclude that the trial court properly granted the defendants' motion for summary judgment on federal preemption grounds, we need not consider this aspect of the trial court's ruling.

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

577

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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quotation marks omitted.) *NetScout Systems, Inc. v. Gartner, Inc.*, 334 Conn. 396, 408, 223 A.3d 37 (2020); see also *Byrne v. Avery Center for Obstetrics & Gynecology, P.C.*, 314 Conn. 433, 447, 102 A.3d 32 (2014) (“[w]hether state causes of action are preempted by federal statutes and regulations is a question of law over which our review is plenary”).

The supremacy clause of the United States constitution provides that federal law “shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby, any Thing in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding.” U.S. Const., art. VI, cl. 2. The dictates of that provision require state law to yield to the extent that it conflicts with federal law. See, e.g., *Freightliner Corp. v. Myrick*, 514 U.S. 280, 287, 115 S. Ct. 1483, 131 L. Ed. 2d 385 (1995). Such a conflict is implicit where, for example, it is “impossible for a private party to comply with both state and federal requirements . . . .” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Id.* There is, however, “a strong presumption against federal preemption of state and local legislation.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Murphy v. Darien*, 332 Conn. 244, 249, 210 A.3d 56 (2019), cert. denied sub nom. *Metro North Commuter Railroad Co. v. Murphy*, U.S. , 140 S. Ct. 847, 205 L. Ed. 3d 468 (2020).

We begin our analysis of whether such a conflict exists in the present case with a brief review of three decisions from the United States Supreme Court examining the question of impossibility preemption in the pharmaceutical context. The plaintiff in *Wyeth v. Levine*, 555 U.S. 555, 558, 129 S. Ct. 1187, 173 L. Ed. 2d 51 (2009), brought an action in a state court alleging, among other things, that she would have benefited from certain additional warnings in the label for a particular brand-name drug. After extensively reviewing federal law relating to drug labeling, the United States Supreme

578 NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

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Court concluded that the plaintiff's state law claim was not preempted because a particular federal regulation, in fact, would have permitted the defendant to unilaterally add such additional warnings to the drug's label, while remaining in compliance with federal law. *Id.*, 568–72, citing 21 C.F.R. § 314.70 (c) (6) (iii) (2008).<sup>33</sup>

The plaintiffs in *PLIVA, Inc. v. Mensing*, supra, 564 U.S. 608–609, also alleged the absence of adequate warning labels. The defendants in that action argued on appeal that, as manufacturers of generic drugs, they could not make unilateral changes to the labels of generic drugs. *Id.*, 610. The United States Supreme Court agreed, concluding that the plaintiffs' claim was preempted because FDA regulations required manufacturers of generic drugs to simply mirror the labeling of their brand-name counterparts.<sup>34</sup> *Id.*, 614, 624. In reach-

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<sup>33</sup> The court noted that the FDA retained authority to retrospectively reject such unilateral changes to the warnings but declined to find impossibility preemption on that ground in the absence of “clear evidence” that the FDA would have done so. *Wyeth v. Levine*, supra, 555 U.S. 571. The plaintiff in the present case asserts that a recent United States Supreme Court case explaining that particular standard, *Merck Sharp & Dohme Corp. v. Albrecht*, U.S. , 139 S. Ct. 1668, 203 L. Ed. 2d 822 (2019), stands for the broad proposition that impossibility preemption “only applies when a defendant can affirmatively show that it attempted to get the FDA to allow the safer alternative proposed by the plaintiff and the FDA affirmatively and officially rejected it.” (Footnote omitted.) We disagree. The clear evidence standard in *Wyeth* applies only when a defendant seeks to prove that compliance with a state law obligation remains impossible *notwithstanding its ability to act unilaterally under federal law*. See *Gibbons v. Bristol-Myers Squibb Co.*, 919 F.3d 699, 708 (2d Cir. 2019) (describing “clear evidence” standard). The brand-name drug manufacturers in *Albrecht* and *Wyeth*, for example, could have satisfied their state law obligation to provide a label with an adequate warning by unilaterally making label amendments. See 21 C.F.R. § 314.70 (c) (6) (iii). No similar federal law would have permitted the defendants in the present case to market Praxbind unilaterally and, as a result, *Albrecht* is inapposite.

<sup>34</sup> The court reasoned as follows: “To be sure, whether a private party can act sufficiently independently under federal law to do what state law requires may sometimes be difficult to determine. But this is not such a case. Before the [defendants] could satisfy state law, the FDA—a federal agency—had to undertake special effort permitting them to do so. To decide

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

579

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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ing that conclusion, the court specifically rejected the plaintiffs' argument that proving impossibility would require the defendants to affirmatively demonstrate that the FDA would have rejected stronger warnings if they had been proposed. *Id.*, 620. The relevant inquiry, the court held, was whether the defendants "could *independently* do under federal law what state law requires . . . ." (Emphasis added.) *Id.*<sup>35</sup>

The United States Supreme Court extended this reasoning to a state design defect claim two years later in *Mutual Pharmaceutical Co. v. Bartlett*, *supra*, 570 U.S. 472. The plaintiff in that case took a generic drug, sulindac, and suffered a severe adverse reaction that was not mentioned in the drug's warning label. *Id.*, 477–78.<sup>36</sup> The plaintiff subsequently brought an action, alleging that sulindac was "‘unreasonably dangerous’" under state law and obtained a verdict in her favor. *Id.*, 479, 486. On appeal, the United States Supreme Court noted that, to satisfy the obligation imposed by state tort law, the defendant would have had to either (1) alter sulin-

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these cases, it is enough to hold that when a party cannot satisfy its state duties without the Federal Government's *special permission and assistance*, which is dependent on the exercise of judgment by a federal agency, that party cannot independently satisfy those state duties for pre-emption purposes." (Emphasis added.) *PLIVA, Inc. v. Mensing*, *supra*, 564 U.S. 623–24.

<sup>35</sup> Accepting the plaintiffs' argument, the court concluded, "would render conflict pre-emption largely meaningless because it would make most conflicts between state and federal law illusory. We can often imagine that a third party or the Federal Government *might* do something that makes it lawful for a private party to accomplish under federal law what state law requires of it. . . . If these conjectures suffice to prevent federal and state law from conflicting for Supremacy Clause purposes, it is unclear when, outside of express pre-emption, the Supremacy Clause would have any force." (Emphasis in original.) *PLIVA, Inc. v. Mensing*, *supra*, 564 U.S. 620; cf. footnote 33 of this opinion.

<sup>36</sup> As a result of a comprehensive review commenced in 2005, the year after the plaintiff in *Bartlett* was prescribed sulindac, the FDA recommended the inclusion of such a warning in sulindac's label. See *Mutual Pharmaceutical Co. v. Bartlett*, *supra*, 570 U.S. 478–79.

580

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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dac's composition or (2) strengthen the warning label. *Id.*, 483–84. The court found that the defendant was legally foreclosed from redesigning sulindac as a generic manufacturer and that, in any event, such alterations were physically impossible in light of sulindac's simplistic composition. *Id.* The court, citing its decision in *Mensing*, also concluded that the defendant, as a generic manufacturer, was prohibited by federal law from strengthening the warnings in sulindac's label. *Id.*, 486. As a result, the court concluded that the plaintiff's state tort claim was preempted. *Id.*, 486–87.

Our review of these decisions compels us to conclude in the present case that the trial court properly granted the defendants' motion for summary judgment as to the plaintiff's design defect claim. In order to cure the design defect alleged by the plaintiff, the defendants would have had to bring Praxbind to market before the decedent's gastrointestinal bleed in 2014. Because there is no dispute that Praxbind was not approved by the FDA until 2015, the defendants could not have satisfied their alleged state law duty to the decedent without marketing an unapproved drug in violation of federal law. In light of that conflict, the trial court correctly concluded that the plaintiff's design defect claim based on the absence of a reversal agent for Pradaxa was preempted. See *PLIVA, Inc. v. Mensing*, *supra*, 564 U.S. 623–24 (“when a party cannot satisfy its state duties without the [f]ederal [g]overnment's special permission and assistance, which is dependent on the exercise of judgment by a federal agency, that party cannot independently satisfy those state duties for [preemption] purposes”).

The plaintiff claims that the test for preemption set forth in *Mensing* and *Bartlett* is inapplicable to present case because those cases do not involve brand-name drugs. We disagree. Although the different levels of control afforded to brand-name and generic manufac-



335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

581

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Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

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turers by federal labeling regulations informed the court's *analysis* in those cases, the nature of the underlying test remained consistent: whether the defendant "could *independently* do under federal law what state law requires . . . ." (Emphasis added.) *Id.*, 620. Because the claim relating to the development and marketing of Praxbind in the present case does not relate to labeling, the plaintiff's attempt to rely on the distinctions between generic and brand-name manufacturers discussed in *Mensing* and *Bartlett* is unavailing. See *Yates v. Ortho-McNeil-Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*, 808 F.3d 281, 296–97 (6th Cir. 2015) ("contrary to [the plaintiff's] contention that the impossibility preemption in *Mensing* and *Bartlett* is limited to generic drugs, we view *Levine*, *Mensing*, and *Bartlett* as together stating the same test for impossibility preemption").

The plaintiff's remaining arguments against preemption do not warrant a different result. First, the plaintiff's assertion that it was *technologically* feasible to develop Praxbind before the decedent's death is insufficient to preclude preemption. Although such practical considerations may sometimes *limit* the options available to a manufacturer; see *Mutual Pharmaceutical Co. v. Bartlett*, *supra*, 570 U.S. 484; that fact is inapposite to the question of whether marketing Praxbind in 2014 would have required the FDA's "special permission and assistance . . . ." <sup>37</sup> *PLIVA, Inc. v. Mensing*, *supra*, 564 U.S. 623–64. For similar reasons, we are also unpersuaded that the FDA's subsequent approval of Praxbind in 2015 is dispositive. The possibility that the FDA would have looked favorably on an earlier application does nothing to alter the fact that, at the time of the decedent's death, the defendants were prevented from unilaterally marketing Praxbind under federal law. See footnote 35 of this opinion. Indeed, the United States

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<sup>37</sup> We likewise reject the plaintiff's arguments relating to evidentiary admissibility and general foreseeability because they do not inform this analysis.

582 NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

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Supreme Court found that the plaintiff's failure to warn claim in *Bartlett* was preempted notwithstanding the fact that, shortly after her injuries, the FDA agreed with her assessment that sulindac's label should include a stronger warning. See footnote 36 of this opinion.

For the foregoing reasons, we agree with the trial court's assessment that the plaintiff's design defect claim relating to Praxbind was preempted by federal law.<sup>38</sup> As a result, we conclude that trial court properly granted the defendants' motion for summary judgment on that claim.

#### IV

The plaintiff's final claim is that the trial court committed reversible error by issuing a curative instruction to the jury after closing arguments. Specifically, the plaintiff claims that the trial court abused its discretion by instructing the jury that it could not hold the defendants liable for failing to conduct tests described in a particular exhibit. In response, the defendants contend that the trial court's instruction was merited because

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<sup>38</sup> We note that courts in other jurisdictions considering related cases have reached the same conclusion. See *Ridings v. Maurice*, Docket No. 15-00020-CV-W (JTM), 2019 WL 4888910, \*6 (W. D. Mo. August 12, 2019) (holding that plaintiffs' design defect claims were preempted "insofar as they are premised on the failure of Boehringer to develop, seek and obtain approval for and/or market a reversal agent for Pradaxa sooner that it did" and noting that issue of feasibility was "immaterial"); *Chambers v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*, Docket No. 4:15-CV-00068 (CDL), 2018 WL 849081, \*13 (M. D. Ga. January 2, 2018) ("Regardless of when Boehringer started the process, Praxbind approval still required the FDA's 'special permission and assistance.' Boehringer could not unilaterally offer Praxbind to physicians. Therefore, initiating the process that *may* have led to Praxbind's approval does not enable Boehringer to comply with both federal and state law. Further, Boehringer was not required to cease production of Pradaxa until Praxbind was approved to comply with federal and state law. . . . Therefore, [the] [p]laintiff's design defect claim is also preempted. [Citation omitted; emphasis in original.]; but see *In re Xarelto (Rivaroxaban) Products Liability Litigation*, Docket No. 2592 (EEF), 2017 WL 1395312, \*3 (E.D. La. April 13, 2017).

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

583

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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the plaintiff improperly used that exhibit to advance a preempted failure to test claim in closing argument. We review this claim for an abuse of discretion. See, e.g., *State v. Northrop*, 213 Conn. 405, 422 n.13, 568 A.2d 439 (1990). Applying that standard to the arguments and record before us, we find no reversible error.

The following additional facts and procedural history are relevant to our analysis of this claim. Before the commencement of trial, the court granted in part a motion in limine filed by the defendants seeking to “exclude evidence, testimony, or argument regarding [a] 110 [milligram] dose” of Pradaxa. In that ruling, the trial court acknowledged that such evidence might be relevant to the plaintiff’s claim that the defendants had failed to adequately warn physicians about the risk of bleeding associated with the 150 milligram dose prescribed to the decedent and, accordingly, deferred ruling on the admissibility of the evidence for that purpose until trial. The court also concluded, however, that such evidence could not be used to prove that the defendants negligently failed “to test, study, investigate, or pursue the various action items identified by the FDA in order to secure approval of the 110 [milligram] dose in the United States” because such a failure to test claim would be preempted by federal law.<sup>39</sup> During trial, the court consistently applied this dichotomy when ruling

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<sup>39</sup> The plaintiff contends, in a conclusory fashion, that the trial court’s legal conclusion on preemption was incorrect and that, as a result, the trial court improperly excluded evidence regarding certain correspondence between the defendants and the FDA discussing a 110 milligram dose of Pradaxa. Specifically, the plaintiff argues that, because the information contained within those documents shows that the defendants could have continued to pursue FDA approval of that lower dose, the trial court incorrectly concluded that the plaintiff’s related, failure to test claim was preempted. For the reasons discussed previously in this opinion, this argument lacks merit. See footnote 35 of this opinion. To the extent that the plaintiff’s brief implies evidentiary error on different grounds, we find those claims to have been inadequately briefed. See, e.g., *Connecticut Light & Power Co. v. Gilmore*, 289 Conn. 88, 124, 956 A.2d 1145 (2008).

584

NOVEMBER, 2020 335 Conn. 547

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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on objections relating to evidence discussing a 110 milligram dose.

The defendants' counsel gave the following closing argument on the plaintiff's failure to test claim:<sup>40</sup> "The failure to test, you've literally not been given the nature of a test that should be done. Instead what you've been told is we did do a lot of study of this issue, we went as far we could, we went further than others did, and we came to the view that we couldn't go farther, a view that the FDA echoed. A failure to test, no." Notwithstanding the trial court's previous ruling, the plaintiff's counsel responded by drawing the jury's attention to a document, admitted into evidence as exhibit 23, discussing in particular detail a "potential path forward" for the 110 milligram dose previously proposed by the FDA. The trial court concluded that the plaintiff's counsel's argument had improperly suggested to the jury that the defendants could be held liable for failing to pursue a 110 milligram dose and, as a result, gave the following curative instruction: "[M]embers of the jury, sometimes in closing arguments things are said by one or more lawyers that needs correction by the court. It's not uncommon for that to happen. . . . [I]t was suggested that you look at exhibit 23 during your deliberations. I am instructing you that you may not hold [the defendants] liable for a failure to conduct the testing outlined in exhibit 23."

The plaintiff's principal argument is that her use of exhibit 23 was proper because the defendants had

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<sup>40</sup> The trial court aptly summarized the failure to test claims ultimately presented to the jury in its instructions as follows: "The plaintiff claims that [the defendants] failed to adequately test, study, and investigate Pradaxa's safety issues, specifically, that [the defendants]: (1) failed to study, test, and investigate plasma concentrations so as to maximize stroke prevention and minimize risk of bleeding relating to Pradaxa and, (2) failed to study, test, and investigate Pradaxa's relationship to gastrointestinal issues and gastrointestinal bleeding."

335 Conn. 547 NOVEMBER, 2020

585

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*Boone v. Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*

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“opened the door” to it during their own closing argument. We disagree. This defendants’ closing argument only broadly discussed the plaintiff’s failure to test claim. See footnote 40 of this opinion. The “potential path forward” described in exhibit 23, by contrast, discusses the prospect of FDA approval for a 110 milligram dose. As a result, the defendants did not open the door to the plaintiff’s use of that exhibit in closing.

The plaintiff also argues that the trial court instructed the jury to “disregard” a full exhibit and that doing so infringed on her right to use that evidence in support of her claims. The trial court’s instruction, however, only precluded the jury from considering a single exhibit to support a particular claim that it had determined was preempted under federal law. Such a restriction was not improper. Finally, the plaintiff claims that she was unfairly prejudiced because the trial court had singled out her argument before the jury as doing “something wrong . . . .” Again, we disagree. The trial court’s instruction was brief, contained no explicit reprimand, and was conveyed using reasonably measured language. In fact, the court described such instructions as “not uncommon . . . .” Under these circumstances, we decline to conclude that the trial court abused its discretion by issuing the challenged curative instruction to the jury.

The judgment is affirmed.

In this opinion the other justices concurred.

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