

Feb 12 AFD 259 Sacklers Opioid Crisis

- Sackler family and Massachusetts Lawsuit
 - <https://www.wbur.org/commonhealth/2019/01/31/sacklers-purdue-oxycontin-billions>
 - *According to the lawsuit, Purdue staff wrote: "It is an attractive market. Large unmet need for vulnerable, underserved and stigmatized patient population suffering from substance abuse, dependence and addiction." They predicted that 40 to 60 percent of the patients buying Suboxone for the first time would relapse and have to take it again, which meant more revenue.*
 - <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2019/02/06/purdue-pharma-lawsuit-sacklers-opioid-crisis>

"Purdue Pharma created the OxyContin Savings Card so people would stay on the drug for longer periods of time, which resulted in higher rates of addiction and more overdoses, claims the Massachusetts attorney general's office in a recent lawsuit against the company and the Sacklers, the family behind it.

"Many pharmaceutical companies provide a savings or discount card for expensive name-brand or high-volume drugs. Internal Purdue documents reveal that people on savings cards remained on OxyContin longer and produced especially 'high returns' for the Sacklers, the suit alleges.
 - <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2019/02/06/purdue-pharma-sackler-family-opioids-massachusetts-maura-healey>

"Let me be clear: First of all, our office is continuing to investigate many other manufacturers and distributors in this space. That will continue. But, just to zoom out for a minute, Purdue Pharma was the company that launched OxyContin in 1996, and for years, the company and its executives misled the public about the addictive nature of its drug. They were the first to market and they were the ones who claimed, at one point, that fewer than 1 percent of patients would ever become addicted. And for years, this was a company that worked the halls of Congress, state legislatures and elsewhere, and certainly any number of pharmacists and doctors offices, to engage in aggressive marketing and sales. And what Purdue's own documents show is the extent of deception and deceit.

"One of the things that we tell and recount in our complaint, we actually point to specific Purdue documents that talked about the specific marketing and targeting of elderly for arthritis, for example, precisely in part because this was a group of patients where Medicare could foot the bill. They had similar strategies. We allege, based on our investigation, that showed the targeting of veterans because they had access to payment streams for that. And they also targeted what they described to be 'opioid naive' prescribers who could be subject or particularly vulnerable to their marketing ploys."
 - https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/lawsuit-claims-sackler-family-disregarded-safety-opioid-addiction-in-purdue-push-to-profit-from-oxycontin/2019/02/01/5d29e072-2660-11e9-90cd-dedb0c92dc17_story.html?utm_term=.0a7c6746e69f

Healey claims the Sacklers pushed for more patients to be on higher doses of opioids for long periods of time. In one email, Richard Sackler, a former president of Purdue, personally directed sales representatives to push doctors to prescribe extremely high doses of opioids, according to court documents. The Sacklers, Healey claims, knew that higher doses put patients at greater risk.

“Millions of dollars were not enough. They wanted billions,” the lawsuit says.

“They cared more about money than about patients, or their employees, or the truth.”

- https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/02/08/opioid-crisis-is-too-big-justice-stop-with-sacklers/?utm_term=.b8abb05ff993

- <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/02/01/690556552/lawsuit-details-how-the-sackler-family-allegedly-built-an-oxycontin-fortune>

- https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/guggenheim-sackler-family-opioid-oxycontin_us_5c5fa303e4b0f9e1b17de467

- <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/feb/10/anti-opioid-protesters-target-new-yorks-guggenheim-over-sackler-family-link>

He said his brother-in-law had been prescribed OxyContin in Manchester, New Hampshire, which has been severely affected by the opioids crisis, and by the time the prescriptions were stopped he was addicted. He then bought pills on the black market before turning to heroin.

“He died of a mix of heroin and fentanyl,” Quin said.

- <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/jan/22/nan-goldin-interview-us-opioid-epidemic-heroin-addict-oxycontin-sackler-family>

Her most recent drug experience was very different to the old days, when she became one of the world’s most famous art photographers, capturing herself and those around her getting high, having sex and hanging out in downtrodden homes in the 70s and 80s.

This second experience began with a doctor in Berlin, where she has a second home. In 2014, Goldin was prescribed the potent narcotic OxyContin for painful tendonitis in her left wrist. She promptly became addicted, despite taking the pills exactly as prescribed.

“The first time I got a ‘scrip it was 40 milligrams and it was too strong for me; they made me nauseated and dulled. By the end, I was on 450mg a day,” she says. Eventually she was crushing and snorting them. When, back in New York, doctors refused to supply her any more, she turned to the black market, and to cheaper hard street drugs whenever she ran out of money.

- (Long-form)

<https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a12775932/sackler-family-oxycontin/>

In 1986, two doctors from Memorial Sloan Kettering hospital in New York published a fateful article in a medical journal that purported to show, based on a study of thirty-eight patients, that long-term opioid treatment was safe and effective so long as patients had no history of drug abuse. Soon enough, opioid advocates dredged up a letter to the editor published in The New England

Journal of Medicine in 1980 that suggested, based on a highly unrepresentative cohort, that the risk of addiction from long-term opioid use was less than 1 percent. Though ultimately disavowed by its author, the letter ended up getting cited in medical journals more than six hundred times.

The Sacklers have been millionaires for decades, but their real money—the painkiller money—is of comparatively recent vintage. The vehicle of that fortune was OxyContin, but its engine, the driving power that made them so many billions, was not so much the drug itself as it was Arthur’s original marketing insight, rehabbed for the era of chronic-pain management. That simple but profitable idea was to take a substance with addictive properties—in Arthur’s case, a benzo; in Raymond and Mortimer’s case, an opioid—and market it as a salve for a vast range of indications.

The controversy surrounding OxyContin shows little sign of receding. In 2016, the CDC issued a startling warning: There was no good evidence that opioids were an effective treatment for chronic pain beyond six weeks. There was, on the other hand, an abundance of evidence that long-term treatment with opioids had harmful effects. (A recent paper by Princeton economist Alan Krueger suggests that chronic opioid use may account for more than 20 percent of the decline in American labor-force participation from 1999 to 2015.) Millions of opioid prescriptions for chronic pain had been written in the preceding two decades, and the CDC was calling into question whether many of them should have been written at all. At least twenty-five government entities, ranging from states to small cities, have recently filed lawsuits against Purdue to recover damages associated with the opioid epidemic.

The Sacklers, though, will likely emerge untouched: Because of a sweeping non-prosecution agreement negotiated during the 2007 settlement, most new criminal litigation against Purdue can only address activity that occurred after that date. Neither Richard nor any other family members have occupied an executive position at the company since 2003.