

OXYCONTIN ABUSE

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Drugmakers lie about toxicity LAWSUITS ACCUSE OXYCONTIN MAKERS OF DOUBLE-DIPPING IN HUMAN MISERY

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The family that owns Purdue Pharma, the company that made billions from the highly addictive opioid drug OxyContin, sought to profit from marketing products to overcome overdoses and treat addictions caused by their drug, even as the company was paying millions in penalties for misrepresenting the addictive qualities of it.

That is the astounding assertion of lawsuits filed by the attorneys general of Massachusetts and New York in federal court against eight members of the Sackler family, according to an April 1 article by the *New York Times*. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/01/health/sacklers-oxycontin-lawsuits.html>) The article cites company documents that say “Pain treatment and addiction are naturally linked,” and showed an illustration of a blue funnel with the wide end labeled “pain treatment” and the narrow end labeled “opioid addiction.”

If true, this means that Purdue and the Sacklers set out to profit grandly by creating addiction and then profit again by treating the addicts. Such a fiendishly evil plot would challenge the imagination of the most gifted crime novelist. And this, mind you, was allegedly perpetrated by a family of philanthropists who have given millions to the arts in New York, Paris, London and elsewhere, one of whom was knighted.

But, such unfettered greed is entirely consistent with the sordid history of the pain-killing drug market since its emergence in the 1990s. Purdue broke down doctors’ resistance to prescribe opioids for pain by paying front groups “disguised as unbiased sources of cutting-edge medical research and information” to educate the public about chronic pain and opioids’ beneficial effects,” according to the *Times* article. It further states that Purdue paid doctors to act as consultants to promote its claims that opioids were safer than high doses of acetaminophen and other anti-inflammatory agents and that there was a tiny risk of addiction.

Sales representatives were incentivized with cash bonuses and free trips to exotic resorts for achieving sales goals, according to the article. They focused on doctors who prescribed high volumes of opioids as well as inexperienced doctors with little knowledge of pain management, urging them to prescribe higher and higher doses.

And when overdose deaths began to raise alarms, the Sacklers told Purdue officials to blame the patients, according to a document cited in the Massachusetts case. “We have to hammer home on abusers in every way possible. They are the culprits and the problem. They are the reckless criminals,” the *Times* quoted from the court filing.

Long before that, the company had been called to task for misrepresenting its products, in 2007 paying over \$600 million in fines after pleading guilty to felony charges in federal court, according to the newspaper. Yet the Massachusetts case cites communications between one of the Sacklers and the company in 2009 demanding to know why opioid sales were not doing better, and in 2011 suggesting the company study patient data to find patterns that could help win new customers to OxyContin.

And the crowning level of crassness has to be the charges in the Massachusetts filing that say the family in 2016 pursued a plan to sell naloxone, the drug that is used by first-responders to reverse overdoses of opioids, and to buy a company that produces an implantable drug pump that treats addiction.

More than 200,000 Americans have died from overdoses since the FDA approved OxyContin in 1995. The cover-up of opioids’ highly addictive qualities ought to rate as one of the greatest medical scandals in American history. But too little has been done to prosecute those responsible for manufacturing drugs with such deadly flaws. Fines are mere slaps on the wrist to people worth \$16 billion. Criminal prosecution and prison time upon conviction would be more appropriate. Even if it didn’t stop companies from continuing to churn out the pills, it might at least prevent their owners from double-dipping in the creation of human misery.

To see video of the Institute’s September 2017 forum, *The Drug Epidemic: How Opioids Became a Death Machine*, click [here](#).