

An Engineered Epidemic: Big Pharma's Role in the Opioid Crisis

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Abstract : 2019 marked 23 years since Purdue Pharma launched its flagship drug, OxyContin, that unleashed an unprecedented epidemic touching both celebrities and common citizens, metropolitan, suburbia and rural areas and all levels of socioeconomic status. From rural Appalachia to East LA individuals, families and communities have been devastated by a trajectory of addiction that often began with the legitimate prescription of a pain killer for anything from a tooth extraction to a sports injury to recovery from surgery or chronic arthritis. Far from being a serendipitous progression of events, the proliferation of this new breed of 'miracle drug' was instead a carefully crafted marketing program aimed at both the medical community and common citizens. This research represents an in-depth investigation of the evolution of the marketing, distribution and promotion of prescription opioids by pharmaceutical companies and its relationship to the propagation of the opioid crisis. Specifically, key components of Purdue Pharma's aggressive marketing campaign, including its bonus system and sales incentives, were analyzed in the context of the sociopolitical environment that essentially created the proverbial 'perfect storm' for the changing manner in which pain is treated in the U.S. The analyses of these series of events clearly indicate their role in first, the increase in prescription of opioids for non-terminal pain relief and subsequently, the incidence of related addiction, overdose, and death. Through this examination of the conditions that facilitated and maintained this drug crisis, perhaps we can begin to chart a course toward its resolution.

Keywords : addiction, opioid, opioid crisis, Purdue Pharma

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