



# How One RX Drug Ignited Addiction Epidemic That Kills 60,000 Americans Per Year

Opioid drug-addiction in the US caused the death of 60,000 people in 2016. Purdue Pharma, the maker of the painkiller, OxyContin, is owned by the Sackler family, worth an estimated \$13 billion. Purdue has been accused of hooking the nation on opioids, because it overstates how long the effects last and downplays its addictive quality. The Sacklers paid \$635 million for false marketing of Oxycontin in 2007, and three Purdue executives have pleaded guilty to criminal charges, but no one has served prison time. According to medical professionals, Purdue Pharma collaborated with the national hospital accreditation agency to change its pain management standards in such a way as to drive doctors to prescribe opioids. Purdue's profits from OxyContin topped \$1.5 billion in 2001, a stratospheric rise compared its 1996 earnings of \$48 million. -GEG

The national drug crisis, which is estimated to have claimed more than 60,000 lives in 2016, is expected to worsen this year and one family-owned company helped set the crisis in motion.

President Donald Trump declared the opioid epidemic a national emergency Aug. 10 on the advice of a White House commission that pointed out, "with approximately 142 Americans dying every day, America is enduring a death toll equal to September

11th every three weeks.” Purdue Pharma, the maker of the popular painkiller OxyContin, often faces the brunt of the blame for the crisis due to the role the company’s marketing played in hooking the nation on opioids.

Purdue Pharma is owned by the Sackler family, listed at 19th on the annual Forbes list of wealthiest families in the country at a worth of \$13 billion. The family’s fortune largely comes from OxyContin sales, which their company branded and introduced as an extended release painkiller in 1995.

Purdue Pharma pleaded guilty in 2007 to felony charges for false marketing of OxyContin and paid \$635 million as a result. The company overstated how long the effects of the medication lasted and severely downplayed the addiction risks of the drug. Three executives also pleaded guilty to criminal charges but dodged prison time.

Dr. Richard Sackler became president of Purdue Pharma in 1999 and co-chairman of the board of directors in 2003, formative times for the company during which it intensely marketed OxyContin and pushed doctors to prescribe opioids for nearly all forms of pain. Despite the company’s admission of guilt during the 2007 lawsuit, Virginia U.S. Attorney John L. Brownlee found no evidence linking Sackler to any misconduct.

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