FDA?s Role in Opioid Crisis Protested by Artists and Drug Policy Activists

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A group of passionate drug policy advocates and artists recently gathered in front of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in Washington, DC to protest the FDA?s role in the current opioid crisis. The protestors held posters memorializing loved ones who lost their lives in the opioid epidemic. They also carried signs reading ?FDA Approved Deaths? and ?FDA Protects Big Pharma Not Us?.

The organizers of the demonstration were from drug advocacy organizations including Recovery Reform NOW, PAIN Sackler, Team Sharing, and the Opioid Spoon Project.

The protestors used a guerilla art installation to deliver their message. Near the entryway of the building, they planted a massive opioid spoon sculpture, branded with the logo of the Food and Drug Administration. This installation is the brainchild of artist-activist Domenic Esposito and the non-profit Opioid Spoon Project.

Esposito and the Opioid Spoon Project have dropped multiple iterations of these 10.5-feet long, 800-pound heavy ?Opioid Spoon Deployments? at various locations including Purdue Pharma and Rhodes Pharma?drug manufacturing companies owned by the Sackler family. Click the link to see Cincinnati's top

rehab placement programs.

?The spoon sculpture?engraved with the FDA?s logo?signifies the responsibility the FDA bears in first causing and now fixing this urgent national health crisis,? Esposito said in a statement regarding the protest. ?We deliver customized spoon sculptures to show those responsible that the recovery community and the general public are watching and will not rest until everyone steps up and cooperates in ending this crisis.?

Protestors called on the FDA to make tangible reforms to federal drug policy to support those affected by the opioid crisis. The organization Wake Up FDA published a public letter to Donald Trump and HHS Secretary Alex Azar, urging them to pivot the FDA towards recovery through the nomination of a ?new commissioner who understands recovery and the FDA?s role in addressing the public health impact of the opioid crisis.?

The letter writes: ?In November 2018, the FDA approved a form of sufentanil, the most potent opioid on the market, despite criticism and outrage from advocates, providers, and policymakers.?

?Currently, there are eight times more opioid painkillers available to patients than there are recovery medications. When we put this in the context of the decisions the FDA has made over the last six months, it?s clearly time to hold the FDA accountable,? the letter added.

Wake Up FDA spokesperson and recovery activist Ryan Hampton said: ?Defying recommendations from its own advisory board members and other experts, the FDA continues to approve dangerous opioids that will wind up diverted while limiting access to recovery medications that would fill gaps in care. We demand transparency and accountability, and we call on the FDA to address the opioid crisis with the urgency it deserves.?

Renowned photographer and founder of PAIN (Prescription Addiction Intervention Now) Sackler, Nan Goldin, was among the participating activists. Her PAIN Sackler advocacy organization raises awareness about the Sackler family and their prominence in cultural institutions.

The organization demands ?all museums, universities, and educational institutions worldwide remove Sackler signage and publicly refuse future funding from the Sacklers.?

PAIN Sackler?s impact on the art world has been enormous. In February, Goldin declared that she would boycott the National Portrait Gallery in the UK if they chose to accept a £1 million (~$1.3 million) donation from the Sacklers. In March, the institution chose to decline the funding.

?We will continue to show up and hold everyone who is complicit in the opioid crisis accountable,? Goldin said in a statement. ?We will continue to call out those who must do more to address this suffering. Today,

it?s the FDA. We will continue to put pressure on the FDA until they meet our demands.?

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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