Sacklers Refuse to Take Blame for Opioid Crisis

June 20, 2019

June 20, 2019 - PRESSADVANTAGE -

In a recent interview with Vanity Fair, the Sackler family refused to take the blame for the opioid crisis. Purdue Pharma, the drug manufacturing company that created OxyContin, is owned by the Sacklers and is facing thousands of lawsuits from most states across the country for its alleged role in spreading the opioid epidemic.

David Sackler told Vanity Fair that he and his family are not at all to blame for the opioid epidemic. He reportedly got upset at suggestions that Purdue Pharma is culpable. Sackler told a story of his 4-year old coming home and asking, ?Why are my friends telling me that our family?s work is killing people??

He said his whole family had nothing to do with the epidemic. ?Facts will show we didn?t cause the crisis,? he claimed, ?but we want to help.?

In the 1990s, Purdue Pharma introduced their new product, OxyContin, as a safe and effective type of opioid. It was heavily marketed with a variety of marketing methods that encouraged doctors to prescribe far more of the drugs. The lawsuits are actually focused on the notion that the Sacklers used misleading marketing tactics to downplay the addictive properties of OxyContin. The company promised that misuse, addiction, and overdose would be rare.

During this time, Sackler?s father, Richard, had a major marketing role in the company. David Sackler himself later served as one of Purdue?s board of directors from 2012 to 2018.

OxyContin uses an extended-release formula that releases the drug slowly over time for a longer-lasting effect. This makes it ideal for people struggling with chronic pain because it means they are less likely to miss their doses. Click the link to see Phoenix's top rehab placement programs.

Purdue argued that OxyContin was less prone to misuse, but in reality, the extended-release formula let Purdue include more opioids in each pill and people found they could bypass the extended-release mechanism and absorb it all at once by crushing and snorting the pills.

Prescriptions skyrocketed and this was the start of the opioid epidemic. Between 1999 and 2017, nearly 200,000 overdose deaths were linked to painkillers, not including the deaths linked to Fentanyl. The US still leads the world in opioid prescriptions to this day. Hundreds of thousands more have been linked to drugs like heroin, Fentanyl, and other opioids.

Sackler told Vanity Fair that it?s not his family?s fault that things worked out this way. He said that Purdue was working with the best science it had at the time.

However, the dangerous traits of opioids have been well known for a long time. Opioid epidemics caused by widespread medical use aren?t new to the US, in fact. A previous opioid crisis took off after the Civil War when soldiers became addicted to morphine given to them to relieve pain from battlefield wounds. This current opioid epidemic is now considered the worst drug crisis in US history. But even before this, the country has known about these risks for well over a century before OxyContin arrived.

Sackler insisted that OxyContin isn?t that addictive. He told Vanity Fair that addiction rates are ?between 2 and 3 percent? and only rise to nearly 5 percent when including more typical cases of dependence and misuse.

In reality, studies have estimated OxyContin addiction rates at 8 percent while misuse rates are as high as 26 percent.

Sackler argued that OxyContin couldn?t be blamed for the opioid crisis because it only makes up a small portion of the opioid market?never more than 4 percent of opioid prescriptions. But opioid policy expert Andrew Kolodny explains that this is not accurate. OxyContin is one of the more potent opioids, meaning it is disproportionately prone to misuse and addiction. So even though it makes up only 4 percent of the prescription share, it is involved in a much higher percentage of all misuse and addiction cases.

It is also important to note that Purdue had a significant role beyond OxyContin. By marketing its new opioids as safe and effective, Purdue created an environment in which opioids, in general, were far more loosely prescribed.

Kolodny and other addiction experts explained in the Annual Review of Public Health that Purdue?s advocacy through education campaigns was focused on the safety and effectiveness of opioids. They also allegedly helped spread the term ?opiophobia? which suggests that doctors were irrationally scared of prescribing opioids.

Sackler said that the real fault behind the opioid crisis falls on government agencies such as the FDA. ?You say, ?Okay, first of all, it was known that those patients were going to exist.? And the FDA approved this medication with that balance in mind. So like any medication that has unintended side effects, you knew that this was one. It was approved as one. Doctors understood it, right??

Regulatory agencies certainly could have done more to prevent the opioid crisis?and the FDA itself agrees, saying that ?the scope of the epidemic reflects many past mistakes and many parties who missed opportunities to stem the crisis, including the FDA.?

But the company who sold one of the most misused drugs surely needs to bear more responsibility than the regulators who failed to stop it. Yet even as the risks became more apparent over the years, drug companies continued marketing the opioids, including for chronic pain. Purdue and the Sacklers are still facing growing legal threats from individuals and different levels of government. There are reports that Purdue may even file for bankruptcy as the potential legal costs continue to pile up.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid or alcohol 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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