Federal Judge Orders Release of Dataset of Drug Industry?s Role in Opioid Epidemic

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A federal court in Ohio is releasing a trove of data that details the size and scope of the US opioid epidemic, including the role played by drug companies and pharmacies like CVS, Walgreens, and Johnson & Johnson, that allegedly profited from the rapid growth of prescription opioid sales. The information was released following an order from a federal judge.

Some of the drug companies fought in court to keep the information secret, saying that it contains proprietary details about their business practices. The US Drug Enforcement Administration also resisted releasing the data, arguing that it included sensitive information used by law enforcement.

But a large portion of the searchable database, known as ARCOS, will be released due to an order signed by Judge Dan Polster. Once available to the public, it will offer a transaction-by-transaction account of how opioids were made, distributed, and sold by pharmacy chains from 2006 through 2012 when the addiction epidemic was growing fast.

?I don't think America truly understands the scope and depth, the level of penetration these pills had in their

communities,? said Paul Farrell, one of the three co-lead attorneys suing the pharmaceutical industry as part of the largest consolidated civil lawsuit related to the drug industry?s role in the drug crisis. ?It's going to be an awakening.?

The data will show exactly which communities around the US were hit hardest, as pharmacies began dispensing more and more highly addictive medications. The Washington Post and HD Media pushed for a year for the database to be made public. Click the link to see Troy's top rehab placement programs.

Judge Polster is overseeing the consolidated lawsuit in Ohio. It involves more than 1,200 local governments suing 23 of the biggest firms in the drug industry, ranging from drug manufacturers like Purdue Pharma to wholesale distributors like McKesson and Cardinal Health. The ARCOS data is set to clarify the role played by distributors and pharmacies.

?You'll be able to see the flow, the steady flow of pills?it's not a trickle, it's a tsunami,? Farrell said. ?In my hometown of Huntington, W.Va., there are 24 CVS pharmacies within 40 miles of my house. From those 24 pharmacies, you'll be able to see that 80 million [opioid] pills were distributed [over a six-year period].? The datasets began to be reported by the drug industry beginning in 2006 and were compiled by the DEA.

Judge Polster declined to release data to the public collected after 2012 because of concerns raised by the DEA that it could interfere with on-going criminal investigations. The judge earlier described the data as ?extremely informative,? adding that the transaction records reveal ?the precise number of opioid pills delivered to each city and county in America, partitioned by manufacturer and distributor and pharmacy.?

CVS earlier issued a statement saying that the pharmacy chain is ?committed to the highest standards of ethics and business practices? and is ?dedicated to helping reduce prescription drug abuse and diversion.?

The lawsuits claim that the players in the pharmaceutical industry worsened the opioid epidemic by aggressively marketing and dispensing prescription medications while lying about the risks. The current opioid crisis is being considered the worst drug crisis in US history.

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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