

Legal battles over OxyContin continue today

OPIOID continued
from page 13

the marketing was intentionally misleading, often presenting these drugs as safer and more effective than other painkillers.

Legal battles over OxyContin continue to this day. For example, earlier this year the Cherokee Nation filed a lawsuit against distributors and pharmacies in Tribal Court over the opioid epidemic. In January, the city of Everett, Wash., filed a lawsuit against Purdue Pharma, alleging that the company knew its product was being sold on the black market.

On Aug. 3, Multnomah County filed a \$250 million lawsuit against several major U.S. pharmaceutical companies, including Purdue Pharma. The county alleges that drug companies spent vast sums of money “marketing, advertising, generating articles, holding continuing medical education courses, making sales visits to individual doctors, and supporting a network of professional societies and advocacy groups intended to create a new, yet false, consensus supporting the long-term use of opioids.”

Such efforts were “wildly successful,” the county asserts, making billions in profits, but also creating a

“profit-driven public health crisis.”

‘It took everything from me’

Tribal member Barry Larsen is a recovering addict and alcoholic. He takes tramadol to manage pain, but says it doesn’t cause problems for him.

“I take it as prescribed and don’t abuse it,” he says. “Alcohol is my drug of choice and has been a problem for the past 25 years, but not opioids.”

At one point, he was hooked on methamphetamine, but quit using it two years ago.

“It took everything from me,” Larsen says. “As long as there was dope around, everything was good. But when we were sitting there at Christmas with no tree, no presents and our power about to be shut off, that was enough.”

Today, he co-leads classes for recovering addicts in Grand Ronde, a far cry from where he was a few years ago. Although Larsen doesn’t struggle with opioid use, he knows of others who have, with devastating consequences. Opioids contain heroin, which is known as being one of the most difficult drugs to quit using due to extremely painful withdrawal symptoms.

“I believe what really started this whole thing was OxyContin,” Larsen says. “People were crushing it, snorting it and smoking it. The pills were like \$30 each. When you get per capita, you can do that but eventually it becomes a problem. A heroin dealer comes rolling along, and gives them more for much cheaper, and pretty soon they’re addicted.”

Behavioral Health Alcohol/Drug Counselor Joe Martineau knows all too well about the devastating effects of substance abuse.

“Today, it seems as if we treat ev-

ery problem with a drug,” he says. “This is a problem nationally and on this Reservation. It’s at a point today where a higher percentage than ever are using prescription medications. It is important to educate the Tribe about what prescription drug abuse is and what the symptoms are.”

Some of those symptoms include constipation, nausea, feeling high, drowsiness, confusion, poor coordination and increased pain with higher doses.

“We need to come together as a community to help our people be in less danger,” Martineau says. “If you’re in a situation where you are dependent on medications, and your doctor is prescribing less, then you may go to illegal sources and get the synthetic version.”

Synthetic opiates, often made in clandestine labs, have been responsible for an increasing number of overdoses because the drugs are often “cut” with other unknown and potentially fatal substances.

According to overdose records from 24 major cities reviewed by *The Washington Post*, synthetic fentanyl, a drug 100 times more powerful than morphine, rose from 582 fatal overdoses in 2014 to 3,946 last year. Officials estimate a much higher number of fatal overdoses this year, especially as the noose tightens around prescription drug availability.


The overdose stories hit Martineau close to home.

“My younger brother became super addicted to opiates,” he says. “This summer, he tried fentanyl for the first time and he died. I’ve lost three nieces, three nephews and three brothers to drugs. My connection is family ... People are dying.” ■

Adult Foster Program



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Manager, Grand Ronde Cultural Resource Dept.




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Gift Making Workshop



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(the workshop is a year round event, future events will be advertised at a later date)

Dinner provided

~~November 9th~~
~~November 30th~~
December 14th

4:00 pm - 6:00 pm
at the Tribal Community Center

Sponsored by the Cultural Education and Youth Prevention Programs