



West Virginia Uses OxyContin Settlement Money to Build a Gym

by by Marianne Skolek, columnist for American News Report on April 30, 2012

In 2001, Darrell McGraw Jr., West Virginia's attorney general, filed a civil case against Purdue Pharma, maker of a controversial and highly addictive drug, alleging that the pharmaceutical company had engaged in "coercive and deceptive" marketing of OxyContin.

McGraw charged that Purdue had used "misleading advertisements and had promoted the inappropriate use of OxyContin for minor pain."

McGraw's lawsuit stated that Purdue Pharma had enticed doctors with free trips to "pain management" seminars where the firm claimed the drug was safe and effective for treating minor pain – without mentioning the drug was supposed to be used only for severe pain and was very easily abused.

McGraw also charged that Purdue told pharmacists that they could "get in trouble" if they did not fill prescriptions — even if they believed someone could be an abuser of the drug. He maintained that the firm's underhanded practices had caused users to become addicted to the drug and that Purdue's annual sales revenue from OxyContin had surpassed \$1 billion.

As a result of Purdue Pharma's [criminal and dishonest marketing](#), West Virginia was left to deal with the cost of treating thousands of people who became addicted to OxyContin and other painkillers. The state today is littered with shattered lives and broken homes caused by the prescription drug epidemic — and West Virginia has the nation's highest drug overdose death rate.

As West Virginia Congressman Nick Rahall recently stated, "If the death toll from prescription drug abuse had instead been at the hands of some foreign enemy, our nation would have declared war long ago."

While in private practice in 2004, Attorney General Eric Holder negotiated Purdue Pharma's \$10 million settlement with West Virginia.

West Virginia's lawsuit was a big worry to Purdue Pharma — they had a lot to lose financially. The suit was such a serious threat to the drug maker, and they called in Eric Holder (now U.S. Attorney General), who was at that time a private attorney working for the law firm Covington and Burling in Washington, DC.

In 2004, just before a jury was to try the case, Holder and Purdue Pharma settled West Virginia's lawsuit for \$10 million. The money was to be used for drug abuse and education programs in West Virginia — but the bonus was that Purdue Pharma would not have to admit any wrongdoing.

Recently the West Virginia State Police Academy opened a new 12,000-foot fitness training center with a gymnasium, weight room, cardio training room and a padded room for physical combat training. Director of training Capt. David Lee advised media outlets that funding from the settlement with Purdue Pharma was used to build the \$1.85 million center.

The settlement money has also paid for several remodeling projects at the academy. Each of the three buildings on campus had their stucco facades replaced with brick; central air and heating was installed in all of the buildings; and a new shooting range was built just up the hill from the main campus. The remodeling cost a little more than \$4 million.

I'm curious if the families of those addicted and dying from West Virginia's prescription drug epidemic prefer dumbbells over drug treatment facilities. Will the victims of the deceitful marketing of OxyContin in West Virginia be able to use the new gym facility and weight rooms to beat their addiction? And will Eric Holder be given a lifetime membership to workout at the gym?

Marianne Skolek is an activist and [investigative reporter](#) who lost a daughter to prescribed OxyContin in 2002. Marianne writes from the perspective of families devastated by the prescription drug epidemic. The views, opinions and positions expressed in this column are the author's alone. They do not inherently or expressly reflect the views, opinions and/or positions of American News Report, Microcast Media Group or any of its employees, directors, owners, contractors or affiliate organizations. American News Report makes no representations as to the accuracy, completeness, currentness, suitability, or validity of any information in this column, and is not responsible or liable for any errors, omissions, or delays (intentional or not) in this information; or any losses, injuries, and or damages arising from its display, publication, dissemination, interpretation or use.

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Victims of OxyContin and Purdue Pharma - a criminally convicted pharmaceutical company

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