

New OxyContin harder to abuse? FDA doubts it

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON

Government advisers voiced skepticism this week that a new version of the potent painkiller OxyContin would live up to its maker's claim of being harder to abuse.

Purdue Pharma LP contends that adding a plastic-like coating to the tablets makes the drug sometimes called "hillbilly heroin" harder to crush and snort or inject.

But advisers to the Food and Drug Administration called for more testing on Monday.

"What we heard from the committee was that they have a lot of concern that the formulation had not been adequately evaluated," said FDA's Dr. Curtis Rosebraugh.

The FDA didn't ask the advisory panel to vote on whether the

new OxyContin version should be approved for sale. Instead, the agency asked for input on its own concerns — such as how much evidence is needed before a product can be sold as a tamper-resistant, if far from tamper-proof, version, and whether the version could backfire.

The FDA isn't bound by the panel's advice but typically follows it.

Purdue Pharma says the plastic-like coating fuses to the tablet, making it harder to crush — and turning into a gooey mess if abusers try to inject it.

The FDA had asked its scientific advisers to determine if the reformulated drug seems tamper-resistant enough to allow on the market, before the required long-term studies are done to see if the changes thwart at least some abuse.

"These are clearly difficult questions for which there are no easy answers," Dr. Bob Rappaport, FDA's chief of pain-killing drugs, wrote the advisory panel earlier.

OxyContin was hailed as a breakthrough in the treatment of severe chronic pain when it was introduced in 1996. A time-release version of the old narcotic oxycodone, it was designed to be swallowed whole and digested over 12 hours to keep a steady state of the painkiller in the bodies of seriously ill patients.

But abusers rapidly discovered the tablets can produce a heroin-like high if crushed and snorted or injected, thus dumping the dose all at once instead of letting it seep in slowly.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration found the number of oxycodone-related deaths

nationwide had quintupled by 2001, as OxyContin prescriptions soared. The DEA cracked down, but OxyContin abuse steadily spread across the country. And a year ago, Purdue Pharma and some of its executives pleaded guilty to misleading the public about OxyContin's risk of addiction earlier in the decade, and agreed to millions in fines to settle state complaints that it encouraged over-prescribing of the drug.

Against that contentious backdrop, the FDA had urged drug companies to develop more abuse-resistant versions of important painkillers, recognizing, in Rappaport's words, "the importance of maintaining the availability of these important drug products for the millions of patients in this country who suffer from chronic pain."

The remade OxyContin marks the first application for a reformulated painkiller that purports to do that, he wrote.

Purdue Pharma said its laboratory studies show the new OxyContin is equivalent to the original in how well the painkiller dissolves if used correctly.

If someone tries to crush it, the plastic-like coating makes the tablet more likely to break into large fragments instead of a powder, the Stamford, Conn.-based company wrote. The coating renders the drug "a gelatinous mess" when mixed with alcohol or other solvents in attempts to dissolve and inject it, the documents say.

But the FDA cited concerns, including:

— Some people who died from OxyContin abuse swallowed the drug without crushing it. Would the new version mis-

lead doctors or patients into thinking OxyContin is less risky than it really is?

— Lower doses are set to be reformulated initially, with higher doses converted in the future. Does that increase risk from the higher doses in the meantime?

Moreover, "there is no perfect formulation that can resist all forms of tampering," FDA's Rappaport wrote. If approved, the new version's label "would have to be carefully crafted so as to avoid the publication of a road map describing how to defeat these changes."

Two other companies, Pain Therapeutics Inc. and King Pharmaceuticals, also are developing an abuse-resistant form of the drug. Called Remoxy, it would provide a thick gelatin-like version of oxycodone.

Jenkins council debates proposed rate increases

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deal more than the upgrade.

Council member Carol Anne Litts, who also owns a business in Jenkins, asked Sanders about a billing error on the water bill for her place of business. Litts said that for years, she has been billed for 1,000 gallons of water per month but two months ago, she received a bill for 10,000 gallons. She said that after checking with the water department, it turned out to be a clerical error of adding an extra zero. However, Litts said her last month bill was for 2,000 gallons and asked why, if she didn't use any more water, had her bill gone up. She said she had gone ahead and paid the bill, but was curious as to the discrepancy.

Sanders and Water Department Superintendent Bo Hopkins told Litts that water meters only read in units of 1,000 gallons for billing purposes and that if a customer uses more than 1,000 gallons but less than 2,000 gallons, he may be billed for 1,000 gallons for several months and then receive a bill for 2,000 gallons. Hopkins said the meter is simply making an adjustment to catch up on the usage.

"The meters catch up from month to month," said Hopkins. "It rolls over each month and it may have just caught up."

"The customer pays per 1,000 gallons," added Sanders. "After a while there is a catch up."

Litts also had questions for Sanders when he presented the Utilities Commission's recommendation to increase sanitation bills. The Utilities Commission proposed to increase garbage collection fees to \$13 a month for residential users. Sanders told the council that commercial rates are very confusing and it will take a while for the commission to untangle them before making a recommendation on raising fees for business users.

"You are proposing to raise rates on the people who actually pay their bills," said Litts. "You're being punished for paying your bill. You're paying for those who don't pay. This year's budget is balanced to the penny. With a balanced budget, how do you respond if we increase the sanitation bill when the budget

is already balanced?"

Sanders replied that primarily due to the large increases in fuel prices, everything associated with hauling garbage has gone up. He said the sanitation department loses approximately \$20,000 per year. Mayor Dixon added that it cost the city \$169 each time it filled the garbage truck up with gas the previous week and that the truck averages three fill-ups each week. Hopkins added that it costs \$40 per ton to dump garbage, in addition to the cost of hauling it to the landfill. He said that one cubic yard in a Dumpster usually averages weighing one ton.

Litts said while she understands the need herself, she wonders if other citizens will be as understanding. She said many people in Jenkins who adopted blue bag recycling had done so with the belief that it would prevent an increase in sanitation fees.

"People thought that if they participated in recycling there would be no need for a raise," said Litts. "Jenkins is basically a retirement community. The seniors already struggle with high costs and high fuel prices."

Sanders told Litts that dumping fees have also increased due to higher prices across the board, but said if the city was paying for the recyclables, the rate increase would probably be between 15 and 20 percent more.

The council will take the proposals for rate increases home for further study and will make a decision at the June meeting.

Council member Linda Baldwin told Sanders that some business users who have Dumpsters are being billed for a three-day-per-week pick-up cycle but are having their Dumpsters emptied every day. Baldwin said the city is basically giving away two free days a week. Sanders replied that the difference in Dumpster size and pick-up is part of the confusion over business rates and the commission hopes to sort it out soon.

Council member Rebecca Terrill added while she understands the water department needs to operate on a balanced budget, she, too, had problems with an increase in sanitation

fees. She said that raises in both services could pose a difficulty for some citizens. Both Terrill and Litts said they had not been aware that water meters could "catch up" from month to month and said they doubted that many water customers are aware of it either.

City Attorney Randall Tackett told the council he wanted to correct a mistaken impression that many seemed to have on paying sanitation bills. Tackett said it is not true that people who pay their bills are being punished, rather they are doing what is right. He said if the city collected every penny of every bill, there would still be a need for rate increases due to general cost increases.

"People should not feel that they are being punished," said Tackett. "The city is providing good services."

"I understand," replied Litts. "But Joe Q. Average Citizen sees people who don't pay their bills. Two months ago I got copies of water bills and occupational licenses. I was appalled at the unpaid bills."

Tackett said there really weren't that many who don't pay and the city has been very aggressive about seeking payment for unpaid bills. "I want to break that theory."

"If this made for a raise for the city employees, there would be no complaints," said Litts. "Will the employees see any raises?"

Ked Sanders told Litts that any raises for employees would be up to the council and mayor but employee raises were on the council's May agenda. However, later in the meeting, Mayor Dixon asked that discussion on employee raises be tabled until the council makes a decision on rate increases and other fiscal matters and the 2008-2009 budget is approved.

Dixon said the city will have to borrow some money for the upgrade of water and sewer lines and the rate increases on water and sewer services will be necessary to pay the loans. City Engineer Paul Nesbitt added that funders will examine rate structures to make certain the city can service the loans before funding the work.

Woman is fraud victim

A Blackey woman received counterfeit money orders after she placed a classified ad on the Internet.

Pauline Collins never suspected that her advertisement for rat terrier puppies on Craigslist and Petfinder.com would attract a scam artist.

Collins received three money orders each in the amount of \$920. The person named Anderson Moller told Collins in an email to cash the \$2,760. Moller then instructed her to take out the cost for two female puppies and



Blackey resident Pauline Collins was recently photographed with two rat terrier puppies that she was going to ship to the United Kingdom. She was asked to cash three money orders totaling \$2,760 and mail the sender of the money orders the change. Collins became suspicious of the money orders and found out they were counterfeit. She has since sold the puppies to a couple in Ashland.



Pictured above is one of the three counterfeit money orders.

shipping fees and to mail back the change. Moller said the puppies would be shipped to the United Kingdom.

"Do let me know as soon as you receive the payment so as to give you the shipper's information, you will send the balance via Western Union money transfer," wrote Moller in an email sent to Collins on April 24.

Then on April 29 Moller sent Collins another email telling her that someone would come and pick up the puppies at her home in Blackey.

"I just want to tell you to ignore the shipping because I have a shipper that will come for the shipment," wrote Moller. "OK, this (is) just what you are to do. Deduct the money for the puppy and send the balance to the shipper via Western Union money transfer for him to be able to come pick the puppy up at your place."

Collins became suspicious when she noticed the money orders were dated January 16, 2008. The puppies were born March 10.

Collins showed the money orders to Susan Adams, bank manager at Community Trust Bank at Isom.

Adams told Collins that coun-

terfeit money orders are a common occurrence and advised her to show the money orders to Gwen Christon, owner of Isom IGA. Christon, who sells similar money orders, called the company's headquarters and was told that the money orders are counterfeit.

Christon told Collins that all the person wanted was the change from the money order.

Collins doesn't like to think about what would have happened to the puppies if she had shipped them overseas.

"The thought of it is unnerving," said Collins. "Those poor little puppies would have starved to death."

Collins sold the two puppies to a couple from Ashland that drove to Blackey and picked them up.

A man from Jenkins bought two puppies and Collins has one puppy left to sell.

Collins is now hesitant to sell her puppies on the Internet.

Collins has placed an ad in the classified section of *The Mountain Eagle* to try to sell the last puppy.

"That kind of stuff happens to other people, but it was the first time it happened to me," said Collins.

Bob Watkins: Boycott is bad idea

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school superintendents (KASS) recommended last month that athletic administrators at public schools adopt a silent boycott against private schools in athletics. Cherry pick which private schools to not schedule beginning this academic year.

We can be certain, can't we, these learned men and women whose time and decisions are paid for by our tax dollars, reached their sports boycott decision long after finding solu-

tions for rising fuel costs for school bus fleets, food prices increases for cafeterias, and rising costs for facility heating bills?

Right? The KASS proposed boycott is but a new knee-jerk twist on an old idea.

1. Athletic directors refuse to schedule another school because a student-athlete's family or guardian circumvented the change-of-residence rule. Reality is, there will always be cheaters. Punishing the many for

transgressions of the few is hardly visionary.

2. One school's coach or coaches 'ran up the score on us last year so we won't schedule 'em this season.'

3. One school's officials turned whistle blower on another's athletics programs.

What did these incidents have in common? All involved public schools.

What good came of the boycotts? Absolutely none.

That tax-funded KASS believes disengagement (boycott) is a solution, while students look on, is a slap in the face for education. And should be an embarrassment for KASS office holders.

News & Views

NEWS. Four University of Kentucky football players were chosen in the NFL draft last week. Three others, and counting, caught on as free agents.

VIEW. Back-to-back bowl wins and the head coach succession set, Coach Rich Brooks and staff will get into more (recruit) living rooms than before.

NEWS. Despite the clamor for play-offs, college football officials cited "unprecedented good health," as prime reason to keep their BCS formula for determining national champions intact through 2014.

VIEW. NCAA officials have no incentive to tinker with their cash cow. Last season there were 32 bowl games. This year, 34.

Congressional Bowl in Washington, D.C. will pit Navy against an ACC opponent. St. Petersburg Bowl at Tropicana Field will match Big East against Conference USA.

Worth Repeating Dept.

UK assistant head coach Steve Ortmayer on Wesley Woodyard going undrafted last week, "... they have no idea what kind of leader he is. He'll make every play on special teams for you. There were 100-plus guys drafted in the last three rounds that can't carry Wesley Woodyard's jock."

Turner talks to Jenkins about severance funding

29th District State Senator Johnny Ray Turner visited the Jenkins City Council this week to talk about how funding is determined in the General Assembly.

Turner told that council at its May meeting Monday that all revenue bills must originate in the House of Representatives and the Senate, which is controlled by Republicans, must then examine the House bills and make its own changes. Turner is a Democrat. Disagreements are settled in conference committees in which Senate and House leaders must come to an agreement over how the bill will eventually look.

"It's kind of like a horse trade," said Turner. "You give me this and I'll give you that. When the Coal Severance Tax list came to the Senate, Senator (President David) Williams stripped everything out of the House budget for Coal Severance. We had to negotiate and try to figure out how to put it back."

Turner said he eventually managed to get funding for a number of projects which benefited the Jenkins area, including the Cane Branch/McPeaks Branch Water Project, the Payne Gap Water Project, and the Number 2 Bottom Sewer Project.

"Overall the county fared pretty well," said Turner. "We put a lot of money into water and sewer. A lot of the money will be used as seed money to expand funding."

Turner said the Carr Creek Lake Treatment Plant will also provide water for Letcher County. Letcher County Judge/Executive Jim Ward told the council that Turner was also responsible for Letcher County receiving an additional \$2.3 million above the coal severance tax funds from state bonded funding, which put the county's state funding at over \$8 million for water and sewer.

Ward and Letcher County Parks and Recreation Director Derek Barto attended the meeting for the opening of bids for playground equipment for the Kiddy Park at Jenkins Lake.

Legacy Playground Equipment submitted the sole bid for \$23,439. Barto told the council the city has \$16,000 plus an \$8,000 match from the county. He said that with upgrades in fences and other work, the total would come to \$31,000, which was under budget. Barto told the council that Parks and Recreation would make up the remainder of the funding for the park, which serves children from age five to 12.

In other council business:

◆ The council heard the first reading of Ordinance #209, which would impose a 0.025 percent fee for Banking Franchise and Local Deposits on banks operating in the city limits.

◆ Mayor Dixon appointed Becky Terrill and council member Rick Damron to serve with

himself and citizen member Ked Sanders on a committee to examine the city's occupational license ordinance.

◆ Police Chief Jim Stephens reported receiving 127 complaints and making 29 arrests. Stephens said that nine arrests were drug related. He also said the department has been praised by the Kentucky State Police for assisting in a recent murder case in the city.

◆ Fire Chief Rick Corbett reported that most calls had been for actual fires as opposed to other forms of assistance. Corbett told the council that the proposed ambulance service for the city cannot get started without having an adequate number of emergency medical technicians and that at present, most of the instructors he has spoken with want

to charge by the participant rather than for the entire class. Corbett said the costs are high and would pretty much take the fire department's entire budget to fund.

◆ Sarah Brown of the Blighted and Deteriorated Property Committee asked that three houses, the Leona Jones property, the Bert Fields property on Elkhorn Avenue, and the Annie Blackman property in Wrights Hollow, be placed on the Blighted and Deteriorated list for action by the city. The council approved the request unanimously.

◆ Mayor Dixon delivered his budget request for Fiscal Year 2008-2009. City Attorney Tackett conducted the first reading of the budget ordinance, which provides for a total bud-

Today's journalism is failing us badly

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time? Often, I fear, we like to think that the media machinery has gotten worse when actually the change is more that we've awoken from customary slumber (which is periodically apt to happen).

Those who point out a longstanding pattern may be called "cynical." But, whatever we call it, the capacity to see the big picture is probably a prerequisite to being able to change it.

Celebrity news — usually

cheap to provide and free of the complications of actual journalism — is very attractive to network programmers. A common rationale is that it's just a matter of giving viewers what they want. But the maverick TV journalist Linda Ellerbee had it right when she said two decades ago: "That is the biggest fallacy in our business. That's the argument that people on our side use to put dreck on the air."

Ellerbee added: "The American public didn't ask for trash television. They'll watch it the

same way we go out and watch a fire. It's not all they want."

In fairness, the advent of cable television has widened the choices for viewers. But the overwhelming bulk of the material that pours through the channels is heavy on the superficial. In real time, we live as history is being made — but the incidental gets so inflated in media importance that we easily lose track of what's important. You might say that's a journalistic failure of historic proportions.

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