

# The Conspiracy That Allows Murder Without Accountability

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › In October 2020, Purdue Pharma – owned and operated by members of the Sackler family – pleaded guilty to federal criminal charges and reached a settlement totaling \$8.3 billion. August 11, 2021, a federal judge granted the Sackler family legal immunity against future litigation
- › In July 2021, Johnson & Johnson and three drug distributors agreed to pay a combined settlement of \$26 billion in a multistate settlement over their roles in the opioid epidemic. They too got a sweetheart of a deal, as the settlement amounts to just 4% of the four companies' annual revenue
- › In May 2021, the Massachusetts attorney general filed a lawsuit against Publicis Health, accusing it of helping Purdue create the deceptive marketing materials used to mislead doctors into prescribing OxyContin
- › The Publicis Groupe is a partner of the World Economic Forum, which is leading the call for a Great Reset in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Publicis also funded the startup of NewsGuard, which is now censoring COVID-19 information
- › NewsGuard's health-related service, HealthGuard, is partnered with the Center for Countering Digital Hate – a progressive cancel-culture leader with extensive ties to government and global think tanks that has labeled people questioning the COVID-19 vaccine as “threats to national security”

**At the end of October 2020, Purdue Pharma, owned and operated by members of the Sackler family, pleaded guilty to federal criminal charges and reached a settlement**

totaling \$8.3 billion.<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. Department of Justice probe found Purdue had intentionally fueled the deadly opioid epidemic using unethical, untruthful and illegal marketing practices. At the time, Robert Weissman, president of Public Citizen, commented:<sup>2</sup>

*“For there to be accountability for the corporate-fueled opioid addiction epidemic, which has cruelly taken hundreds of thousands of lives, there must be prosecution of those members of the Sackler family who, along with other executives and owners, were responsible for Purdue Pharma’s deadly deception, as well as a stripping away of their ill-gotten gains from an evil scheme to push addictive drugs for profit.”*

## **Sackler Family Let Off Scot-Free**

Well, that simply wasn’t to be. August 11, 2021, a federal judge granted the Sackler family legal immunity against future litigation over their role in the opioid epidemic.<sup>3</sup> The obvious question is why?

The Sacklers knew their drug was highly addictive and responsible for nearly half a million U.S. overdose deaths in the decade between 1999 and 2019,<sup>4</sup> yet they chose to hide that fact and encouraged doctors to overprescribe.

Purdue’s sales representatives were extensively coached on how to downplay the drug’s addictive potential, claiming addiction occurred in less than 1% of patients being treated for pain. Meanwhile, research<sup>5</sup> shows addiction affects as many as 26% of those using opioids for chronic noncancer pain.

The results were predictable. Patients became addicted at record rates, and when they couldn’t obtain more OxyContin, they turned to street drugs like heroin and fentanyl. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,<sup>6</sup> 841,000 Americans died from drug overdoses between 1999 and 2019, and opioids were involved in 70.6% of the overdose deaths that occurred in 2019.

It's quite remarkable that our legal system is letting the Sacklers get off scot-free, seeing how they were clearly in charge of the company's deadly decisions.<sup>7,8,9</sup> Adding insult to injury, the Sacklers decided to cash in on the problem they created by developing and selling addiction treatment.<sup>10,11</sup> As reported by Nation of Change:<sup>12</sup>

*"Purdue will be bankrupt, but members of the multi-billionaire Sackler family – who were responsible for the decisions that led to these deaths and profited the most from Purdue's opioid dealings – will gain near-total immunity from future litigation. By the time the settlement is paid out they most likely will be as wealthy as they ever were. So where does personal responsibility come in?"*

## **Hold the Sacklers Accountable in the Public Sphere**

In 2018, Paul Hanly, a leading attorney in the case against Purdue, referred to the Sacklers as "a crime family ... drug dealers in nice suits and dresses."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, yet the Sacklers had carefully built a public image of themselves as a family of "philanthropists," donating a fraction of their ill-gotten wealth to prestigious medical schools and fancy museums through the years.

As noted by Nation of Change, "In return for the donation, honorees are imbued with moral approval." Well, it's time to retract that moral approval, and the only ones who can do that is us. We need to demand that those who took Sacklers' donations recognize the harm the family has done, and strip the Sacklers of their honors.

*"Richard Sackler and other family members involved in this tragedy deserve to be shamed," Nation of Change writes.<sup>14</sup> "Institutions that took their blood money should remove the Sackler name from their centers, professorships, buildings, and pediments. If they won't be held accountable in a court of law, they must be held accountable at least in the public sphere."*

In the video below, Patrick Bet-David interviews Dr. Chris Johnson, an emergency medicine physician, about the opioid epidemic and the role of unethical drug companies. As noted by Johnson, drug companies appear to view fines for illegal activities as a routine business expense. It's a great business model. They can easily

afford the fines if caught so shareholders are protected, and no one goes to jail. The only people who get hurt are the patients.

## **Other Opioid Makers Get Sweetheart Deals**

Purdue isn't the only opioid maker whose executives have been spared accountability for their deadly decisions. In July 2021, Johnson & Johnson and three drug distributors — AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health and McKesson — agreed to pay a combined settlement of \$26 billion in a multistate settlement over their roles in the opioid epidemic.<sup>15</sup>

They too got a sweetheart of a deal, as the \$26 billion settlement amounts to just 4% of the four companies annual revenue. In an article for CounterPunch, Richard Eskow writes:<sup>16</sup>

*“Apparently, that’s what attorneys general for a number of states thought was adequate compensation for all the lost lives, for the mothers living on the street and the children born addicted, for the grieving families, desolate neighborhoods, and dying communities.*

*‘Distributors can easily bear this burden,’ analysts at a stock market firm wrote. ‘We haven’t popped the champagne yet, but the bottle is definitely chilling.’ Having lost a close family member to an opioid overdose, I was unable to get over my fury for days after reading this sentence.”*

## **Great Reset Promoter Sued for Deceptive Marketing**

While Purdue’s owners, the Sackler family, got off without so much as a slap on the wrist, states struggling with the exorbitant cost of opioid addiction aren’t ready to bury the hatchet just yet. Instead, some are going after the PR firm that created and ran Purdue’s deceptive marketing campaigns.

As it turns out, that PR firm is none other than the Publicis Groupe, a partner of the World Economic Forum, which is leading the call for a Great Reset in the wake of the

COVID-19 pandemic.

While Publicis is part of an enormous network that includes international drug companies, fact checkers, Big Tech companies, the banking industry, the U.S. government, the World Health Organization and the World Economic Forum, just to name a few, Publicis appears to be a key player when it comes to coordinating the global effort to censor COVID-related information.

Publicis Health admitted its involvement in this censorship agenda as recently as April 27, 2021. In a tweet,<sup>17</sup> the agency announced its partnership with NewsGuard, “to fight the ‘infodemic’ of misinformation about COVID-19 and its vaccines.” In short, Publicis Health is dedicated to suppressing any information that hurts its Big Pharma clients.

Publicis is more than a partner with NewsGuard, however. NewsGuard actually received a large chunk of its startup capital from Publicis. NewsGuard, a self-proclaimed arbiter of truth, rates websites on criteria of “credibility” and “transparency,” ostensibly to guide viewers to the most reliable sources of news and information.

In reality, however, NewsGuard ends up acting as a gate keeper with a mission to barricade unpopular truth and differences of opinion behind closed gates. Its clearly biased ranking system easily dissuades people from perusing information from low-rated sites.

## **PR Has Replaced the Free Press**

To understand the power that PR companies such as Publicis wield, you also need to realize that PR has, by and large, replaced the free press. In decades’ past, pro-industry advertising stood in stark contrast to the free press, which would frequently expose problems with products and industries, thereby serving as a counterbalance to industry propaganda.

When a free press with honest reporting based on verifiable facts actually does its job, ineffective or toxic products are driven off the market. All of this changed in the late

20th century, when media outlets started relying on advertisers for the bulk of their revenues.

Journalists came under the control of advertisers, who now had the power to kill stories they didn't like. Today, news organizations simply won't run reports that might harm the bottom line of its advertisers and, not surprisingly, the drug industry is among the top-paying advertisers.

By further partnering with the "big guns" of media – such as the Paley Center for Media, which is composed of every major media in the world<sup>18</sup> – Publicis and its industry clients have been able to influence and control the press to virtually eliminate the public's ability to get the truth on many important issues, including COVID-19.

Seeing how Publicis represents most of the major pharmaceutical companies in the world and funded the creation of NewsGuard, it's not far-fetched to assume Publicis might influence NewsGuard's ratings of drug industry competitors, such as alternative health sites. Being a Google partner,<sup>19,20</sup> Publicis also has the ability to bury undesirable views that might hurt its clientele.

NewsGuard's health-related service, HealthGuard,<sup>21</sup> is also partnered with the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) – a progressive cancel-culture leader<sup>22</sup> with extensive ties to government and global think tanks that has labeled people questioning the COVID-19 vaccine as "threats to national security."

## **Publicis Knowingly Promoted Over-Prescription**

Getting back to the issue of opioids, at the beginning of May 2021, the Massachusetts attorney general filed a lawsuit<sup>23</sup> against Publicis Health, accusing the Publicis subsidiary of helping Purdue create the deceptive marketing materials used to mislead doctors into prescribing OxyContin.<sup>24,25,26,27</sup> As reported by Yahoo! News:<sup>28</sup>

*"The lawsuit alleges that Publicis 'engaged in myriad unfair and deceptive strategies that influenced OxyContin prescribing across the nation,' a statement by Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey's office said. Those*

*strategies were carried out through dozens of contracts between 2010 and 2019, worth more than \$50 million ...*

*Tactics included combatting doctors' 'hesitancy' to prescribe the medication, and persuading them to prescribe OxyContin over lower-dose, short-acting opioids, thus increasing the risk of addiction. Massachusetts is asking that Publicis Health pay 'compensatory damages' of an unspecified amount for having 'created a public nuisance.'"*

The complaint further notes that:<sup>29</sup>

*"By design, Publicis' schemes worked to counter public health measures intended to reduce unnecessary opioid use, because more opioid use generated more profits for Publicis' opioid clients."*

## **Publicis Health's Damaging PR Is Just 'Business as Usual'**

Publicis Health argues that its work for Purdue was lawful and limited to "implementing Purdue's advertising plan and buying media space." But according to the lawsuit, Publicis' work included:

- Placing illegal advertisements for OxyContin in the electronic medical records of patients
- Creating training materials for Purdue sales reps on how to combat doctor's objections to the drugs
- Developing strategies to counter opioid guidelines issued by the CDC
- Creating "patient stories" to "humanize" the OxyContin brand and counter negative press about addiction risks.<sup>30,31</sup> One such patient vignette featured a 40-year-old man who had his dose increased from 10 milligrams (mg) a day to 20 mg in just three weeks
- Creating and sending thousands of deceptive emails to doctors, encouraging them to not only increase patients' dosages but also to prescribe the drug to patients who

were already on less dangerous pain meds<sup>32</sup>

The lawsuit also alleges that Publicis instructed Purdue to target doctors who were already writing out dangerously high numbers of prescriptions, even in the midst of a raging opioid epidemic,<sup>33</sup> all while agency executives gleefully discussed the record fees they'd collect from the Purdue account. A March 2016 email exchange reveals the Publicis subsidiary was expecting to make up to \$12.28 million from Purdue that year alone.

## **Time to Reevaluate Marketing Ethics**

While Publicis is trying to downplay its role in what has been described as the crime of the century, the lawsuit against it will hopefully result in a reevaluation of marketing ethics. The agency, knowing full well there was an epidemic of opioid abuse underway, took on the job of increasing Purdue's profits by making that lethal trend worse.

**“ Publicis’ view that public health is of no concern when creating drug PR also tells us something about the COVID shot PR push we’re currently experiencing.”**

Publicis claims they were just doing what advertising agencies do – they created promotional materials that boost client revenue. However, this argument circumvents any notion of ethics and concern about public health. They're basically admitting that it's all about making money, regardless of the cost.

Even if their actions were within legal limits (which the Massachusetts case will eventually establish), their actions were immoral and clearly undermined public health.

Seeing how Publicis represents most of the biggest drug companies in the world, this raises the question of ethics in drug advertising in general. Publicis' view that public



health is of no concern when creating drug PR also tells us something about the COVID shot PR push we're currently experiencing.

## **Censorship Works Against Public Health as Well**

Publicis wants you to believe they are protecting public health by supporting COVID-19 censorship, but this is actually having the opposite effect. How can you possibly make an educated decision about COVID "vaccination" if you're not allowed to learn anything about the risks?

What Publicis calls "misinformation" is simply information that contradicts the propaganda dictated by the hands that feed it, i.e., the drug industry. History tells us companies driven by profit interest make poor truth tellers, as negative information will clearly have a detrimental impact on their bottom line. So, they lie and obfuscate. It's that simple.

Public relations firms like Publicis are mere arms of these notoriously untruthful industries. They do their bidding because that's what they're paid to do. To think that Big Pharma and paid propagandists are looking out for anyone but themselves is naïve in the extreme.

It is actually ironic doublespeak that Publicis claims to defend against misinformation that puts the public at risk, while having played a crucial role in a lethal health care scheme that was built on lies and deceit.

## **Struggling With Opioid Addiction? Seek Help!**

In closing, remember that opioids – regardless of the brand – are extremely addictive drugs that are not meant for long-term use for nonfatal conditions. Chemically, opioids are very similar to heroin, and if you wouldn't consider shooting up heroin for that toothache or backache, you really should reconsider taking an opioid to relieve your pain.

If you've been on an opioid for more than two months, if you find yourself taking higher dosages or taking the drug more often, you may be addicted and are advised to seek help from someone other than your prescribing doctor. Resources where you can find help include:

- Your workplace Employee Assistance Program
- The [Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration](#)<sup>34</sup> can be contacted 24 hours a day at 1-800-622-HELP

## Sources and References

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- <sup>3</sup> [Nation of Change September 4, 2021](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [CDC Opioid Basics](#)
- <sup>5</sup> [New England Journal of Medicine 2016; 374:1501-1504](#)
- <sup>6</sup> [CDC Drug Overdose Deaths](#)
- <sup>7, 10</sup> [New York Times April 1, 2019](#)
- <sup>8</sup> [Esquire October 16, 2017](#)
- <sup>9</sup> [New Yorker October 30, 2017](#)
- <sup>11</sup> [STAT News September 7, 2018](#)
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- <sup>25, 30</sup> [Forbes May 7, 2021](#)
- <sup>26</sup> [CommonHealth May 7, 2021](#)
- <sup>27</sup> [Courthouse News May 6, 2021](#)
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