

OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma starts ad campaign for claims

February 24 2020, by Geoff Mulvihill



This Feb. 19, 2013, file photo shows OxyContin pills arranged for a photo at a pharmacy in Montpelier, Vt. OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma launched an ad campaign Monday, Feb. 24, 2020, to tell people harmed by their powerful prescription opioid where they can file claims against the company. (AP Photo/Toby Talbot, File)

OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma launched an ad campaign Monday to tell people harmed by their powerful prescription opioid where they can file claims against the company.

The \$23.8 million campaign is part of Purdue's bankruptcy proceedings as it tries to resolve close to 3,000 lawsuits over its role in the opioid crisis.

Notifying people who may have claims against a company is a standard part of a bankruptcy case. But Purdue's efforts —worked out with input from a committee of creditors and other interested parties and approved by a bankruptcy judge in White Plains, New York—are unusually expansive.

The Stamford, Connecticut-based company has proposed a settlement that could be worth more than \$10 billion over time, including the value of drugs it is producing and a contribution of at least \$3 billion in cash from members of the Sackler family that owns the company.

About half the states oppose that deal, saying it doesn't do enough to hold the company or family responsible in an opioid crisis that has been linked to more than 430,000 deaths in the U.S. over the past two decades.

Online ads starting Monday direct people to a website where claims can be made.

Other versions are to appear later in magazines, newspapers, TV and radio, billboards, movie theaters, and other places to let people know they have until the end of June to file claims.

Ads are intended to reach 95% of U.S. adults, with those people seeing or hearing the ads an average of six times. Part of the plan also calls for

encouraging news coverage of the claim applications.



In this Sept. 12, 2019, file photo cars pass Purdue Pharma headquarters in Stamford, Conn. OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma launched an ad campaign Monday, Feb. 24, 2020, to tell people harmed by their powerful prescription opioid where they can file claims against the company. (AP Photo/Frank Franklin II, File)

Lawsuits against the company have been filed mostly by governmental entities.

But individuals harmed by the company can also make claims through the bankruptcy process.

It has not yet been ironed out how much of a settlement may be available to private parties, or which people may receive a piece of it. For instance, it's still subject to negotiations on whether people who used OxyContin illicitly would be entitled to the same kind of benefits as those who were prescribed the powerful drug and became addicted.

The heart of lawsuits against Purdue is that the company promoted its drugs to doctors especially in misleading ways, downplaying risks and overstating benefits. The company stopped marketing OxyContin about two years ago.

Ed Neiger, a lawyer representing a committee of individuals seeking a say in the Purdue bankruptcy, said the big campaign is important because, unlike in a typical bankruptcy, it's hard to figure out who all the creditors might be or where to find them.

"A lot of the victims don't know that they were victimized. They may think that they're addicts. They may think that they have a moral failing or a character failing," Neiger said. "There were people in a boardroom that caused them to become addicted to opioids."

The cost of the ad campaign is small compared with the other bill Purdue is paying during its bankruptcy, Neiger said.

Purdue isn't alone in promoting the claims. Monday morning, the top Google result for some searches related to claims against Purdue was from an unidentified law firm promising to help people with the process.

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