

Testimony Submitted on Behalf of

CVS Pharmacy

To

United States Senate

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee

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**Carlos Ortiz, R-Ph
Vice President of Government Affairs
CVS Pharmacy**

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The following is an offer of information for the Committee's consideration regarding Oxycontin on behalf of our pharmacists and pharmacy staff at CVS/pharmacy:

Oxycontin

Oxycontin, a controlled release oxycodone, entered the prescription drug market in 1995 as an opioid agonist and a Schedule II controlled substance indicated for the management of moderate-to-severe pain when a continuous around the clock analgesic is needed for an extended period of time. It was not intended for use on what the medical and pharmacy community would term a "prn" basis. PRN is an abbreviation of a Latin term (pro re nata) that means as needed.

Oxycontin is an extremely effective drug when prescribed for its intended use. The drug has a legitimate use of providing long-term pain relief especially to those who experience chronic pain and terminal cancer patients. These patients can maintain a better quality of life by ingesting fewer tablets and experiencing longer periods of time without pain.

Abuse of Oxycontin

Unfortunately, Oxycontin, like other opiates, has a high potential for abuse, whether legal or illicit. The media made the public aware that chewing, crushing, dissolving and injecting, snorting, or smoking the drug would provide a quick heroin-like euphoria.

Inappropriate prescribing, prescription fraud, prescription rings engaging in "Doctor Shopping", employee thefts, increased number of evening break-ins, and armed robberies, have been the direct result of the abuse of Oxycontin.

According to Jay P. McCloskey, a former U. S. Attorney in Maine from April 1993 to May 2001, Oxycontin was the prescription opiate most widely abused in Maine, with the exception of one county. He also noted that the speed with which prescription opiates and heroin became established among a growing population of high school age youth and kids in their late teens and early twenties was alarming and that these drugs were being used on a recreational basis.

Armed Robberies Specifically for Oxycontin

Oxycontin losses in the form of employee pilferage and armed robberies were minimal until 2001.

For example, robbery losses in Massachusetts

1998 7 (1 armed robbery)
1999 27 (5 armed robberies)
2000 25 (2 armed robberies)
2001 105 (87 armed robberies)
2002 From Jan to Feb 7, 2002 13 (13 armed robberies)

These figures were obtained from the Massachusetts Board of Pharmacy.

As you can see, Oxycontin targeted armed robberies are rising at an alarming rate. In addition to Massachusetts, Oxycontin armed robberies have occurred in Maine, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Alabama, New Hampshire, Vermont, Florida, Indiana and Rhode Island.

This is extremely frightening for all pharmacists, pharmacy staff, and their families. Some pharmacists have been robbed more than once. Some of the robberies have been violent. The incidences of armed robberies were rare prior to the onset of Oxycontin abuse.

We are very concerned about the safety of our colleagues as long as this drug is on the market in its current formulation.

Actions requested from the HELP committee

- Increase penalties for individuals who commit armed robberies of healthcare providers.
- Encourage Purdue Pharma, L.P., manufacturer of Oxycontin, to reformulate the product to reduce the potential for abuse. It is our understanding that Purdue Pharma is working on this process. Please urge them to accelerate their activities.
- Encourage the FDA to “Fast Track” any reformulated product application.

We believe that these actions would significantly reduce the abuse of Oxycontin without significantly reducing its effectiveness as a pain relief medication or its availability. These actions would also help to protect health care workers, especially community pharmacists. At a time when pharmacists are in short supply and great demand, many community pharmacists are rethinking their decision to practice in the community. This, in many cases, is the direct result of the threat of violence attributable to the armed robberies associated with Oxycontin abuse.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

