

Editorials

Editorial: Feds should demand safer OxyContin now

San Antonio Express-News

Web Posted : 12/17/2001 12:00 AM

The company that manufactures OxyContin is under fire from federal officials.

A powerful painkiller that can produce a heroin-like high when snorted or injected, OxyContin has been blamed for more than 290 fatal overdoses and much misery in the past two years.

Abuse of the drug has swept across some areas of the country, including the Myrtle Beach, S.C., area where, the New York Times reported, a large number of suspicious prescriptions failed to elicit a reaction from manufacturer Purdue Pharma.

The company was raked over the coals last week by the head of the Drug Enforcement Administration and members of a House subcommittee because of its marketing practices.

And the Times reported that Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., plans to seek a General Accounting Office investigation of Purdue's marketing of OxyContin.

It's no time to feel sorry for Purdue, but federal officials need to look ahead not backward.

Action must be taken to track people who fill a suspicious number of prescriptions and doctors who carelessly write them.

Additionally, Purdue earlier announced plans to reformulate Oxy-Contin so it would be more difficult for abusers to crush and snort or inject. In its pill form, it is time-released and does not produce a drug high.

But the firm said it could take three years to make the change.

Congress and the DEA should use their powers to force Purdue to expedite the reformulation of OxyContin.

While officials talk and pose, the drug remains on the street.

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