



Appalachian Focus

Appalachian Focus Civil News

| [Home](#) | [Back](#) | [News List](#) | [Sitemap](#) |

Deaths tied to ingredient in OxyContin Appalachian Focus Civil News

B1: Submit

Date: 4/10/01

Time: 8:11:43 AM

Discussion

FROM: Charleston Gazette, Charleston, West Virginia Sunday April 8, 2001

Deaths tied to ingredient in OxyContin

But oxycodone also found in 40 more painkillers

By Greg Stone SUNDAY GAZETTE-MAIL

A review of last year's autopsy reports by the West Virginia Medical Examiner's office revealed that four state deaths were caused by oxycodone, the sole ingredient in the widely abused painkiller OxyContin.

In nine other deaths, the attending physician considered oxycodone instrumental enough in the death to mention it under "immediate cause of death" on the deceased death's certificate. Other drugs, however, were also present in these cases, said Dr. Henry Taylor, commissioner for the state Bureau for Public

Health.

Seven other deaths were classified as "multiple drug intoxications," Taylor said. When Dr. Jim Kaplan at the medical examiner's office investigated further, Taylor said, oxycodone was also present in those persons.

OxyContin is not the only analgesic - or painkilling - drug on the market to include oxycodone, though OxyContin contains nothing else.

The compound is also present in at least 40 other drugs, including Percodan and Percocet. These two longtime painkillers are "cut," or diluted, with aspirin and acetaminophen.

There is no sure way of knowing if the oxycodone identified in the cases came from OxyContin, though one of the examining physicians actually identified the drug by name when he filed his report.

Purdue Pharma, L.P., the Stamford, Conn., company that manufactures OxyContin, routinely disputes specific death figures attributed to the drug. They point out that many other drugs contain oxycodone and that OxyContin is typically abused in combination with other drugs.

"I'm unable to add a lot of information," said Purdue Pharma spokesman Jim Heins. "I'm not denying OxyContin can be potentially fatal when abused. We say that on our package inserts. And there are 40 other drugs that contain oxycodone."

Executive director of public affairs Robin Hogen gave the Sunday Gazette-Mail a letter to Purdue Pharma from David Jones, executive director of the Kentucky State Medical Examiner's office.

In the letter, Jones says he is "unaware of any reliable data in Kentucky that proves OxyContin is causing a lot of deaths."

Jones, however, said he had never gathered any data on oxycodone when he wrote the letter to Purdue. His brief computer search turned up the following numbers:

For the year 2000, two people in Kentucky died of oxycodone poisoning. Two died of an oxycodone and alcohol combination.

Twenty-three died of oxycodone in combination with other drugs.

So far this year, two people in Kentucky have died of oxycodone overdoses, three more in combination with other drugs.

Jones declines to blame OxyContin for the oxycodone numbers, pointing to the multiple drug cases.

"How are you going to say one drug did it and not another?"

The Virginia state medical examiner's office, meanwhile, reports 35 accidental deaths from oxycodone since 1997, 21 suicides and three undetermined fatalities.

Though toxicology reports on death certificates aren't ironclad in implicating OxyContin, there is plenty of evidence of widespread abuse.

Law enforcement officials, substance abuse counselors and community leaders across West Virginia all say OxyContin is becoming a scourge.

The little town of Gilbert in Mingo County made news late last year, when residents banded together to fight what they say is an epidemic of OxyContin abuse. Use seems to have spread since then, north to the Kanawha Valley and beyond. Other rural states, for some reason, seem particularly hard hit.

Recreational users obtain OxyContin by any number of means. They may "doctor shop" - go from doctor to doctor seeking the drug - steal prescription pads or manipulate physicians' penmanship.< /font>

Sometimes, family members steal the pills from an elderly relative's prescription supply and use or sell them. OxyContin sells for about \$1 a milligram. Contrary to the manufacturer's instructions, the pills are either crushed and snorted or boiled and injected, kicking off an intense high.

OxyContin abuse is attracting national media attention. The current Newsweek features a cover story about painkillers. The magazine highlights the OxyContin struggles of the Kentucky town of Hazard. Rolly Sullivan, professor of behavioral medicine and psychiatry at West Virginia University, said he started seeing OxyContin cases two years ago.

"It didn't just slide in," Sullivan said. "It came roaring in." Nicholas County Circuit Judge Gary Johnson says of OxyContin, "I've never seen anything like this. People are stealing from their grandmothers."

Several Nicholas County parents have had rights to their children terminated by the state Department of Health and Human Resources, because of OxyContin abuse.

The parents had simply abandoned the children, leaving them with relatives, to chase OxyContin.

"It's beyond belief," said Nicholas County public defender Greg Hurley. "Every other person who walks in my office is involved in this stuff - selling, stealing, whatever. Half the crimes in this county are related to OxyContin."

From October to December of last year, the taxpayer-funded Medicaid program, which provides health care to the poor, elderly and disabled, spent \$1.4 million on 7,800 OxyContin prescriptions. Those prescriptions went to 2,700 people.

"That's about 2 percent of our total drug expenditures, which is pretty high," said Phil Lynch, acting commissioner for the state Bureau for Medical Services.

Because of the high cost to Medicaid and the rampant abuse potential of OxyContin, beginning April 16 the bureau will require prior authorization from a physician before it agrees to pay for the drug. It is a fairly loose restriction; however, physicians must only ask for permission if the dose is greater than two tablets a day, of any size.

That means a physician could prescribe 320 milligrams a day of OxyContin - a very high dose - without explanation. OxyContin's largest tablets are 160-milligram strong.

Physicians on the bureau's drug utilization review committee were adamant that the restriction should be relatively lenient, Lynch said. Some cancer patients, for instance, need that much pain relief, he said.

Lynch said bureau physicians could elect to tighten the policy, if costs continue to rise and abuse appears to increase. .

© Copyright 2000 Sunday Gazette-Mail

[Development funds head to Appalachia](#) 7/11/01 9:14:20 AM

[PEIA's spending on OxyContin up 38 percent](#) 7/10/01 10:21:50 AM

[Petition filed to examine racial inequality among juveniles](#) 7/10/01 10:06:44 AM

[Riot rocks private prison in Floyd](#) 7/10/01 8:07:20 AM

[Goal is to get OxyContin off market, attorney says](#) 7/10/01 8:00:17 AM

[Commandments still on Pulaski courthouse wall](#) 7/10/01 7:42:10 AM

[Harlan takes down Ten Commandments](#) 7/10/01 7:37:00 AM

[Local attorney heads OxyContin lawsuit](#) 6/27/01 8:26:06 AM

[Region gains \\$1.8 million in assistance](#) 6/26/01 11:23:55 AM

[Some feel faith only cure for OxyContin abuse](#) 6/26/01 10:18:14 AM

[OxyContin abuse in region called 'a plague'](#) 6/26/01 9:43:02 AM

[Judge orders Bible text removed](#) 6/26/01 9:11:45 AM

[Pot-fighting agency in Appalachia broadens its scope to other drugs](#) 6/26/01 9:09:28 AM

[OxyContin maker, others sued by Kentucky plaintiffs](#) 6/26/01 9:06:05 AM

[Outlook for ARC in Congress is favorable](#) 6/26/01 9:03:14 AM

[Globe-hopping Rogers racks up free trips](#) 6/17/01 9:56:24 AM

[McConnell's secrecy on center donors spurs debate](#) 6/17/01 9:49:50 AM

[Prison bureau plans seminars at Preston sites Later in June for job applicants and others](#) 6/17/01 9:39:13 AM

[Commissioners may reduce the size of prison addition](#) 6/17/01 9:37:53 AM
[Confederate descendants taking to streets over flag](#) 6/17/01 9:36:40 AM
[Pharmacist: Deterrent to OxyContin is simple](#) 6/17/01 9:35:08 AM
[Crowded jails look at options for relief](#) 6/17/01 8:55:37 AM
[SW Virginians file multibillion-dollar lawsuit against maker of OxyContin](#) 6/17/01 8:54:19 AM
[Appalachian Law](#) 6/12/01 9:49:52 AM
[Fate of several projects depends on wet-dry vote, vintner says](#) 6/12/01 9:47:07 AM
[Abuse of OxyContin spreads across Virginia](#) 6/12/01 9:43:42 AM
[W.Va. chosen for project to stop OxyContin abuse](#) 6/12/01 9:41:06 AM
[Woman gets \\$550K in racial bias suit](#) 6/12/01 9:35:29 AM
[Counties prepare for new regional jail](#) 6/12/01 9:30:04 AM
[Lawsuit targets OxyContin](#) 6/12/01 9:28:48 AM
[State steel community happy about Bush's import action](#) 6/6/01 9:34:03 AM
[OxyContin](#) 6/6/01 9:32:43 AM
[New bottle unveiled for Hatfield-McCoy Reunion](#) 6/6/01 9:24:59 AM
[Black youths more likely to go to jail](#) 6/5/01 9:40:48 AM
[Lincoln man arrested in racial disturbance](#) 6/5/01 9:35:17 AM
[Purdue Pharma talking about cutting production of OxyContin](#) 6/3/01 10:16:39 AM
[Commandments case rejected by high court](#) 6/3/01 9:42:33 AM
[Eastern Ky. schools struggle to keep students](#) 5/29/01 1:16:23 PM
[Men suing OxyContin makers, doctors](#) 5/29/01 12:53:12 PM
[Morehead officer suspended Faces charge of rape](#) 5/23/01 9:14:18 AM
[Prison officials probe guard's link to white supremacist mischief](#) 5/23/01 9:09:57 AM
[Prisons have business booming in Preston](#) 5/23/01 9:04:03 AM
[There's craftiness afoot in Madison County](#) 5/22/01 8:52:59 AM
[Ex-inspector charged with falsifying data](#) 5/22/01 8:48:24 AM
[Preston has a lock on new prison for 2003](#) 5/22/01 8:45:41 AM
[Bureau of Prisons will host seminars in June](#) 5/22/01 8:40:58 AM
[New jails proposed for Southwest Va.](#) 5/22/01 8:39:12 AM
[Native Americans concerned about destruction of burial sites in county](#) 5/22/01 8:34:38 AM
[The wonder and the scourge of OxyContin](#) 5/22/01 8:23:19 AM
[Too many inmates, too few cells in Tennessee county jails](#) 5/22/01 8:19:29 AM
[Grundy doctor's trial opens](#) 5/16/01 9:16:30 AM
[M.D.: Racism caused man's shooting spree](#) 5/15/01 8:33:11 AM
[Former judge ordered to repay county money](#) 5/15/01 8:26:30 AM
[Federal case arises from investigation of "chop shop"](#) 5/15/01 8:24:55 AM
[Jury unable to reach a decision in constable case](#) 5/15/01 8:23:50 AM
[Jury unable to reach a decision in constable case](#) 5/15/01 8:22:31 AM
[Constable trial goes to the jury](#) 5/15/01 8:21:00 AM

[Kentucky data may go into OxyContin fight](#) 5/15/01 7:39:09 AM
[Maker of OxyContin halts most potent pills](#) 5/15/01 7:32:50 AM
[Stumbo is accused in child support suit](#) 5/15/01 7:24:17 AM
[Renewal issue divides town once owned by Ford](#) 5/15/01 7:15:56 AM
[Bring a copier, judge rules](#) 5/6/01 9:41:42 AM
[Jury backs man fired after opposing bridge](#) 5/6/01 9:36:49 AM
[DOC mulls medium-security prison in McDowell](#) 5/6/01 9:20:07 AM
[Indians restore prayer pole at 705 property](#) 5/1/01 11:21:21 AM
[Native Americans pay respects at Townsend burial site before paving](#) 5/1/01 11:09:54 AM
[Native Americans dedicate Townsend site](#) 5/1/01 11:08:09 AM
[Cross-burning was done over race of infant](#) 5/1/01 11:02:07 AM
[Alleged kingpin of OxyContin operation arrested](#) 5/1/01 9:13:01 AM
[Patton urges teamwork to boost Eastern Ky.](#) 5/1/01 7:50:02 AM
[Harlan schools, ACLU unable to agree on Commandments](#) 5/1/01 7:41:28 AM
[Price state paid for Perkins land sparks surprise](#) 4/26/01 8:44:13 AM
[TV host's pay for speech criticized](#) 4/26/01 8:42:05 AM
[Former Paintsville police chief indicted](#) 4/26/01 8:39:47 AM
[Twelve indicted on OxyContin, other drug charges](#) 4/26/01 8:34:14 AM
[State judges do well in 'junket' report](#) 4/26/01 8:26:08 AM
[Former state official must return kickback](#) 4/26/01 8:24:44 AM
[Minorities lacking on list of area's influential](#) 4/24/01 10:46:54 AM
[Cumberland High closes new chapel](#) 4/22/01 8:11:46 AM
[Board attorney urges closing of Cumberland High chapel](#) 4/22/01 8:07:43 AM
[OxyContin fast becoming high on list as drug of choice](#) 4/22/01 8:05:04 AM
[Oxycodone products making the headlines for drug abuse, crime](#) 4/22/01 8:03:23 AM
[Slain gay man's mom blames silence](#) 4/22/01 7:51:15 AM
[Two arrested for selling OxyContin](#) 4/17/01 8:07:16 AM
[Two Kanawha men admit to roles in burning of cross](#) 4/17/01 7:58:20 AM
[Harlan officials, leaders will focus on cutting the grip of OxyContin](#) 4/17/01 7:14:51 AM
[Bar attracts the footloose even if dancing is illegal in Va. town](#) 4/17/01 7:13:26 AM
[Some in mountain towns question census data](#) 4/17/01 7:08:36 AM
[Abuse of OxyContin rages despite police crackdowns](#) 4/17/01 7:05:31 AM
[OxyContin-abuse death toll raised to 18 in Virginia](#) 4/17/01 7:03:55 AM
[Eight charged with selling drug in Madison](#) 4/17/01 7:02:32 AM
[Court censures Fouty for racial slur](#) 4/11/01 7:02:39 AM
[Town meeting on OxyContin next week](#) 4/10/01 8:22:26 AM
[Tazewell residents turn out for town meeting on OxyContin](#) 4/10/01 8:20:13 AM
[Deaths tied to ingredient in OxyContin](#) 4/10/01 8:11:43 AM
[Six more found guilty of prescription drug violations](#) 4/10/01 8:08:30 AM

[Hazard woman dead of apparent overdose](#) 4/10/01 8:06:47 AM
[Report: Deaths skyrocketed when OCs went on sale](#) 4/10/01 8:05:21 AM
[Woman indicted in Oxycontin theft](#) 4/7/01 6:13:45 AM
[Dozens plead to OxyContin charges](#) 4/6/01 9:33:24 AM
[Marchers rally against drugs in downtown Hazard](#) 4/4/01 7:54:33 AM
[Drugs found at P'burg High](#) 4/4/01 7:52:54 AM
[OxyContin gets bad rap, doctors say](#) 4/4/01 7:51:46 AM
[Tazewell residents turn out for town meeting on OxyContin](#) 4/3/01 7:40:02 AM
[Grand jury's probe targets paving contracts](#) 4/1/01 9:26:18 AM
[Commandments back in court](#) 4/1/01 9:24:48 AM
[Preacher battling for Ten Commandments](#) 3/30/01 8:53:07 AM
[Engineers, financial advisors explain regional jail benefits](#) 3/27/01 8:00:01 AM
[Sheriff's office makes arrest, seizes large quantity of drugs](#) 3/27/01 7:58:03 AM
[Turkish-Appalachian officials work toward economic alliances](#) 3/26/01 7:06:25 AM
[This painkiller can kill](#) 3/25/01 7:30:18 AM
[Combined agency effort sets town meeting on oxycontin abuse](#) 3/25/01 7:26:57 AM
[Loss of jobs, children bad for southeastern Kentucky's future](#) 3/23/01 10:27:11 AM
[Family of OxyContin dealers sentenced](#) 3/20/01 8:01:36 AM
[Former minister indicted for sodomy](#) 3/20/01 7:59:40 AM
[Troopers seek repeal of hate-crimes law](#) 3/20/01 7:48:18 AM
[Task force: Look beyond OxyContin](#) 3/16/01 7:58:11 AM
[Foes list tobacco industry donations](#) 3/16/01 7:56:10 AM
[Danger drug sparks crime wave across Appalachia](#) 3/16/01 7:52:50 AM
[Ky. 160 residents say their road isn't a safe alternative for trucks as U.S. 119](#) 3/14/01 7:46:05 AM
[Tax plan leaves out many kids](#) 3/14/01 7:42:16 AM
[Bluefield police cleared in beating](#) 3/14/01 7:40:57 AM
[Police converge on Coeburn area to bust OxyContin distributors](#) 3/14/01 7:38:27 AM
[Senator proposes increasing the limit on how much agencies can be sued](#) 3/14/01 7:36:07 AM
[Justice gets 1 to 10 on each count](#) 3/14/01 7:34:59 AM
[Big trucks banned on part of U.S. 119](#) 3/13/01 8:47:40 AM
[Wearing of Confederate flag could be issue in some local schools](#) 3/13/01 8:45:19 AM
[Mingo deputy charged with embezzlement](#) 3/13/01 8:37:44 AM
[Officer suspended over fatal crash](#) 3/13/01 8:34:33 AM

As an extension of a non-profit organization, all information presented on this web site is for educational purposes only. Any copyrighted material is designated as such with the author(s) retaining full copyrights. While the Bulletin Board is open for public comment, the opinions or statements are solely those of the person posting the information. This is a public service provided by Appalachian Focus, who is not responsible for the information presented herein.

Send mail to larry@appalachianfocus.org with questions or comments about this web site.

Copyright © 1999-2001 Appalachian Focus

Last modified: April 10, 2001

Web Design by [Millennium Imagery](#)

This site is hosted with pride at [Net Express](#)