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# County sues opioid makers

Scott Mahoney | The Chronicle-Telegram

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ELYRIA — A 258-page lawsuit filed on behalf of Lorain County alleges that violations of law and a pattern of racketeering activity by opioid manufacturers have directly injured the county and its residents because of the costs the county has paid associated with the opioid crisis.

The lawsuit was filed in Lorain County Common Pleas Court on Wednesday by attorneys representing the county two weeks after the county commissioners announced they had hired Napoli Shkolnik, a law firm based in New York, as outside counsel on the matter.

The suit lists 25 defendants starting with Purdue Pharma, the maker of the painkiller Oxycontin, which is viewed as a major factor in the rise of opioid addictions across the country. Other defendants include Cephalon Inc., Johnson & Johnson, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Watson Laboratories Inc., Endo Health Solutions, McKesson Corp., Cardinal Health and Amerisourcebergen Corp.

The county joins a growing list of municipalities that want to see drug companies held accountable, even financially responsible, for the ripple effects of their drugs hitting the market, leading to addiction, overdoses and deaths.

“Obviously, the opioid crisis has put a tremendous strain on the prosecutor’s office, Sheriff’s Office and coroner’s office,”

Commissioner Matt Lundy said. "We want accountability, and that's why we're taking this action."

The suit contends that the opioid manufacturers' and distributors' marketing opioids for long-term use to treat chronic pain included information that was "false, misleading, contrary to credible scientific evidence and their own labels, and lacked balance and substantiation."

The suit also says the marketing materials omitted material information about the risks of opioids and overstated their benefits.

It also claims the manufacturers exacerbated the problem with a collective effort to hide from the medical community "the fact that the FDA 'is not aware of adequate and well-controlled studies of opioid use longer than 12 weeks.'"

"Through their direct promotional efforts ... defendants accomplished exactly what they set out to do: change the institutional and public perception of the risk-benefit assessments and standard of care for treating patients with chronic pain," the suit said. "As a result, Lorain (County) doctors began prescribing opioids long-term to treat chronic pain — something most would never have considered prior to (the) Defendants' campaign."

Elyria, Lorain and Dayton already are in the fight for financial compensation, and the lawsuit is similar to one filed earlier this year by Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine.

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