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**CITY OF CHICAGO SUES BIG PHARMA FOR DECEPTIVELY MARKETING
HIGHLY ADDICTIVE PRESCRIPTION PAINKILLERS**

*Drug Manufacturers Knowingly Downplayed Serious Risks, Promoted Unfounded Benefits
Associated With Highly Addictive Painkillers*

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today announced that the City of Chicago has filed a lawsuit in Illinois state court against five pharmaceutical manufacturers for misrepresenting the benefits of opioids, a class of highly addictive narcotic painkillers, and concealing the serious health risks associated with these drugs. This deception has led to an increase in prescription painkiller abuse, addiction and overdose that plagues communities in Chicago and in other cities across the country.

“For years, big pharma has deceived the public about the true risks and benefits of highly potent and highly addictive painkillers in order to expand their customer base and increase their bottom line. This has led to a dramatic rise in drug addiction, overdose and diversion in communities across the nation, and Chicago is not immune to this epidemic,” said Mayor Emanuel. “Today, we’re saying enough is enough – it’s time for these companies to end these irresponsible practices and be held accountable for their deceptive actions.”

The lawsuit charges that five of the nation’s largest opioid manufacturers, Purdue Pharma L.P., Cephalon, Inc., Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc., Endo Health Solutions Inc. and Actavis plc, knowingly and aggressively marketed these drugs as rarely addictive, while touting benefits that lacked scientific support in order to boost profits. Their efforts to increase the sale of these drugs have been successful, as the [sale of opioids has quadrupled](#) between 1999 and 2010. In fact, enough prescription painkillers were prescribed in 2010 to medicate [every American adult around the clock for one month](#).

“We believe that these pharmaceutical manufacturers have violated a number of city ordinances and other laws in the marketing and sale of these drugs,” said Chicago Corporation Counsel Stephen Patton. “The purpose of the lawsuit is simple: to stop this deceptive and unlawful marketing and hold these companies responsible for the harm their deception has caused.”

In addition to the general, deceptive promotion of opioids to treat chronic pain, these drug companies specifically target their marketing to the elderly and veterans, with false promises that the opioids were unlikely to be addictive and would help improve their function and quality of life. These actions have often led to catastrophic results.

A 2008 investigation reported that [87 percent of all opioids](#) dispensed were to patients using them to treat chronic pain on a long-term basis, even though there is no scientific evidence supporting the long-term use of these drugs for non-cancer chronic pain.

The City's Health Insurance Plan has reimbursed claims for approximately \$9.5 million on these drugs since 2008. The increase in misuse and abuse of these drugs is also generating additional health care costs. For example, estimates of visits to the emergency department in Chicago due to the misuse and abuse of prescription painkillers have been steadily increasing, with a significant [increase of 65 percent](#) between 2004 and 2011. It is estimated that in Chicago in 2009, opioid misuse and abuse resulted in [1,080 trips](#) to the emergency room.

"Caring for patients addicted to prescription painkillers was one of the most challenging parts of my clinical practice and I've seen firsthand the damage it can cause to individuals, families and entire communities," Chicago Public Health Commissioner Bechara Choucair, M.D. "Prescription drug abuse has quickly become a major health epidemic across the country, and stopping deceptive marketing tactics is essential to protecting public health."

Many patients who receive a valid prescription for an opioid painkiller become addicted to these powerful drugs. Even law abiding citizens who are prescribed these painkillers can become addicted, and some may turn to heroin because it produces the same high but is cheaper and easier to access. A recent study found that heroin use among those who misuse or abuse opioid painkillers has increased, with most reporting abuse or misuse of these drugs [before starting heroin](#).

By dramatically increasing the market for opioids, the drug companies have also created a supply of drugs that are diverted to people to whom they are not prescribed. In fact, more than [three out of four people](#) who misuse prescription painkillers use drugs prescribed to someone else.

The City is not seeking to ban these drugs. The lawsuit seeks to end deceptive marketing so that patients and physicians are able to make informed decisions.

"These companies have misled doctors and consumers over many years, and on behalf of our residents, they need to be held accountable," said Maria Guerra Lapacek, Commissioner of the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection. "This lawsuit should serve as a wake-up call not just to these pharmaceutical companies, but to every business with Chicago consumers - our City will not tolerate consumer deception."

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