

U.S. & WORLD

Walgreens to pay \$300M to settle with Department of Justice over opioid allegations

BY LISA SCHENCKER
Chicago Tribune
(TNS)

Walgreens Boots Alliance has agreed to pay \$300 million to settle allegations that it filled millions of invalid prescriptions for opioids and other controlled substances and illegally billed federal programs such as Medicare for those medications, the U.S. Department of Justice announced Monday.

The federal government had alleged that Deerfield, Illinois-based Walgreens filled prescriptions with “egregious red flags,” according to an amended complaint filed last week in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. The government alleged that Walgreens filled prescriptions with high dosages of opioids, filled prescriptions for the drugs too early, and filled prescriptions for a dangerous combination of three drugs, from late 2013 to early 2023, according to the complaint.

The government had alleged that Walgreens pressured its pharmacists to fill the prescriptions quickly, without giving them time to check if the prescriptions were valid.

The government also alleged that Walgreens submitted the invalid prescriptions to federal health insurance programs, including Medicare for reimbursement, in violation of the federal False Claims Act.

“Walgreens knowingly filled numerous invalid controlled-substances prescriptions that were either not issued in the usual course of professional practice, not for a legitimate medical purpose, or both,” the government had alleged, according to the settlement agreement. “Walgreens knew

that such prescriptions raised significant concerns and were highly likely to be invalid. But Walgreens nevertheless filled numerous such prescriptions without resolving the significant concerns those prescriptions raised.”

Walgreens has denied the allegations. The settlement agreement does not include any admission of wrongdoing or liability by Walgreens.

“We strongly disagree with the government’s legal theory and admit no liability,” said Walgreens spokesperson Fraser Engerman in a statement Monday. “Our pharmacists are dedicated healthcare professionals who care deeply about patient safety and continue to play a critical role in providing education and resources to help combat opioid misuse and abuse across our country.”

Engerman said the settlement allows “Walgreens to close all opioid related litigation with federal, state, and local governments and provides us with favorable terms from a cash-flow perspective while we focus on our turnaround strategy that will benefit our team members, patients, customers, and shareholders.”

As part of the settlement, Walgreens will also have to pay interest on the money, and it will have to pay an additional \$50 million if the company is sold or merges with another company before fiscal year 2032. Walgreens announced last month that it had agreed to be sold to a private equity firm in a deal expected to close in the fourth quarter of the year. That sale announcement followed years of financial struggles for the retail pharmacy giant, which has been grappling with changing consumer habits, challenges related to medication reimbursement and a ill fated foray into primary



A Walgreens store at Armitage and Milwaukee avenues in Chicago on March 13, 2025. (Terrence Antonio James/Chicago Tribune/TNS)

care.

As part of the settlement agreement, Walgreens must also maintain policies and procedures requiring pharmacists to make sure controlled substances are valid before filling prescriptions for them, among other requirements.

U.S. Attorney General Pamela Bondi said in a news release Monday, “Pharmacies have a legal responsibility to prescribe controlled substances in a safe and professional manner, not dispense dangerous drugs just for profit.”

The allegations against Walgreens were originally brought by whistleblowers who were former Walgreens

employees, with the first of the whistleblowers filing a lawsuit in 2018. The U.S. Department of Justice intervened in the consolidated cases in August.

The federal False Claims Act allows whistleblowers to sue on behalf of the U.S. government and receive a share of any money recovered. The four whistleblowers will receive 17.25% of the settlement money, according to the Department of Justice.

The settlement announcement comes less than two months after Walgreens said it had agreed to pay a separate, \$595 million settlement to a virtual care company over a dispute involving COVID-19 testing.

• Longest

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Allegiance and the mission and vision statements, the meeting was underway. The Board approved the Consent Agenda without any changes, which approved the minutes from the March 24 meeting, the financial report, personnel report and grant progress report.

First to the podium was Kensey Williams, who gave the Board a much-awaited update on the new website for the college. Williams, who is a bit of a Jill-of-All trades at the college, was tasked with setting up a more user-friendly website that would attract would-be students instead of deter them. She stated in the meeting Monday evening that it takes approximately 3.7 seconds for the launch page to load, which to some might not seem like a very long time, but as she pointed out- that 3.7 seconds is as long as it takes for the average student to give up and move on when looking at a prospective college.

Working with an outside group, Modern Campus, Williams has crafted a website that is easy to navigate with menu items that are scaled down to be sure that they are “short, sweet and to the point.” Two of the most important things to be displayed on the website are directly on the launch page itself- how to request information and

how to apply. Other items that will be changed include a streamlined campus directory; students will be able to submit events around campus easily and the student and faculty sides of the website are now clearly delineated to make sure there is less confusion when navigating. Williams hopes that the website will be ready for a projected launch date of June 30.

David Adams, Vice President for Student Affairs, approached the Board next to introduce them to this month’s Student of the Month, Makentis Adams. Adams, a Liberal Studies major, hails from Topeka and plays on the ICC Football team.

ICC President Dr. Jonathan Sadhoo gave a quick update on the funding aspects of the proposed welding facility, sharing that the funding from the Department of Commerce’s DRAW grant has been pushed back to October to help the college find the funds to close the gap that the college owes on the project. The college is currently looking for other grants to look into to help facilitate the growth of the program. Sadhoo also mentioned that, if the funds are not all expended before October, the college can ask for another extension into December without receiving a penalty or being asked to repay any funds.

Taylor Crawshaw, Vice President for Academic Affairs, asked for approval from the board for

an overnight trip for Upward Bound Summerfest/ Bridge students to Oklahoma City. This would be an overnight trip to visit the University of Oklahoma, as well as museums and other sites including the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Crawshaw stated that the trip is approved for a maximum of 40 students, but feels that there should not be any more than 30 that will be attending. The program is asking for \$12,000 for total expenditures, which is 100% grant funded. The Board approved.

ICC Vice President for Human Resources, Lori Boots, addressed the Board next to discuss the early retirement of Dr. Isaias McCaffery. McCaffery is the longest tenured professor at ICC and his early retirement was a surprise to many members of the Board. McCaffery submitted his written request to retire under the college’s early retirement policy on March 25. Boots shared that he has reached all eligibility requirements and has requested for his retirement to be effective as of July 1. The Board reluctantly approved.

Boots remained to ask the Board to approve the College’s early retirement benefit to all employees, which is a yearly occurrence. The Board approved the continuance of the early retirement benefit.

David Adams re-approached the Board to discuss a possible new Telehealth carrier for the

college and suggested that the Board approve TimelyCare. He went on to discuss the merits of the program, sharing that it provides:

- An emergency crisis number that is operational 24/7 from any location
- Success coaching
- Basic needs support
- Health coaching
- Scheduled counseling
- Medical help
- Self-care content

Currently for the mental health Telehealth program that ICC is utilizing, the fee per year comes up to over \$43,000. Having to go out for RFP’s from two other providers, Adams found that TimelyCare was the cheapest, coming in at \$13,500 for the first year. The one caveat, Adams stated, was the fact that after that first year, a 6% increase will be accessed for the next three years, making the grand total of the 3-year contract a little under \$43,000.

Board member Mark La-

sater asked Adams what the current provider usage looked like throughout the campus. Adams shared that nine students had registered for the service, but only five are actually utilizing it at this time. He feels that a number of students would prefer in-person service and has been working in close concert with his counterpart at Coffeyville Community College to possibly offer in-person counseling sessions in the future and is looking into working with Four County Mental Health in the future as well.

The Board voted 4-1 to approve the use of TimelyCare. Lasater voted negatively.

Sadhoo was last to speak before moving on to his comments, sharing that the college had found a more affordable truck to help pull the Rural Outreach Grant. The truck, which was previously approved would pull the trailer that would be utilized by this program,

but would cost \$10,000 more and take much longer than the new truck. The new vehicle, a 2025 Dodge Ram 3500 Big Horn Crew Cab 4x4 Cummins turbo-diesel and would be purchased from Quality Motors for \$67,401.

The Board moved to approve the May 19 meeting to May 7 and the accounts payables.

Dr. Sadhoo briefly touched on the topic of consolidation, sharing that he has been in touch with various entities to see what the college’s options are. He shared with the board that the earliest the merger might happen would be in 2027, but in all aspects, it may not occur until 2028. He did note that both schools had stop clauses within their contracts in case either wanted to back out of negotiations if there were any unforeseen issues that cropped up. It seems like both colleges are currently in a holding pattern until something gets the ball rolling.

BUSINESS

Local Financial Advisor qualifies for Edward Jones recognition conference

Edward Jones Financial Advisor Gregg Webster recently qualified for the Edward Jones recognition conference, Pinnacle, which celebrates the contributions and achievements of the 159 most successful financial advisors, from the firm’s more than 20,000, in sustaining a successful practice. The event will be held April 28-May 1 in Laguna Niguel, CA and includes financial advisors from both the U.S. and Canada.

“We’re elated to have qualified for the Pinnacle conference, which I’m sure will offer new ideas and best practices for us,” Webster said. “I believe that a successful practice is the result of many factors, including deep relationships with my clients and the backing of a dedicated client support team.”

At Pinnacle, which is reserved for those who have achieved the highest level of firm recognition, attendees will have the opportunity to closely interact with firm leaders and one another, sharing ideas and feedback on how the firm can continue to grow its impact for its



clients, colleagues and the communities it serves.

Webster and his client support team professionals can be reached at 620-331-1126. You may also visit Webster’s website at edwardjones.com/gregg-webster.

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• Tax incentives

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Overland Park beat out Nashville, Phoenix, Dallas, Fort Worth, Atlanta and the South Florida area in the company’s search.

Republican U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran and Democratic U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids lauded the deal.

“Kansas continues to attract top-tier businesses, and I look forward to welcoming Fiserv to Overland Park,” Moran said.

The governor said the new hub is making good on her administration’s promise to “modernize and diversify” the state’s economy.

“Fiserv’s new strategic hub in Overland Park is a significant step forward

as we continue to elevate Kansas to new heights,” Kelly said. “Fiserv will create high-value career options, including opportunities for military personnel transitioning to civilian life and graduates of our higher education system.”

Fiserv chose Overland Park, the announcement said, because of its central location in the United States, proximity to clients in the Midwest, affordable cost of living and the opportunity to recruit talent in the tech field.

Tim Cowden, president and CEO of the Kansas City Area Development Council, called the investment “monumental.”

He added: “And so is the Kansas City region’s ability to deliver.”

The Kansas City area has the capacity and competitiveness to rise to the occasion, he said, which he attributed to a “fast-growing tech sector,” a cache of talent and a prosperous, collaborative business community.