

Drug company used rap video to push for higher doses, sales

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This still image from a 2015 video presented as evidence by the U.S. Attorney's Office in federal court in Boston on Wednesday, Feb. 13, 2019, shows a scene from a rap video made to motivate Insys Therapeutics sales representatives to get doctors to prescribe higher doses of the company's highly addictive fentanyl spray. Company founder John Kapoor and four other former executives are charged with scheming to pay bribes and kickbacks to physicians to induce them to prescribe higher doses. Kapoor and the other executives have denied all wrongdoing. (Insys Therapeutics/U.S. Attorney's Office via AP)

Employees at a drug company accused of bribing doctors rapped and danced around a person dressed as a bottle of the highly addictive

fentanyl spray in a video meant to motivate sales reps into getting patients on higher doses.

The video was shown to jurors this week in the closely watched trial in Boston of wealthy Insys Therapeutics Inc. Founder John Kapoor and four other onetime executives, including a former exotic dancer who prosecutors say was hired as a regional sales manager even though she had no pharmaceutical experience.

They're charged with scheming to pay doctors bribes and kickbacks in exchange for prescriptions of the drug meant for cancer patients with severe pain. Kapoor and the former other executives of the Chandler, Arizona-based company have denied all wrongdoing.

The video, titled "Great by Choice," was shown during a national sales meeting in 2015 to encourage employees to talk doctors into prescribing higher doses, prosecutors said.

In it, suit-clad sales reps rap to the tune of a song by the artist A\$AP Rocky about titration, the process of increasing the strength of a patient's prescription until it reaches the adequate level.

"I love titration, yeah, that's not a problem. I got new patients and I got a lot of 'em," they say. "Build relationships that are healthy. Got more docs than Janelle's got selfies."

At one point, the person dressed up as the bottle of fentanyl spray takes off his costume to reveal then-vice president of sales, Alec Burlakoff. Burlakoff pleaded guilty in November to racketeering conspiracy and is expected to testify against Kapoor.



In this Jan. 30, 2019, file photo, Insys Therapeutics founder John Kapoor leaves federal court in Boston. Kapoor and four other former company executives are accused of scheming to bribe doctors into prescribing a powerful fentanyl painkiller. (AP Photo/Steven Senne, File)

"What we built here can't be debated. Shout to Kapoor for what he created," the sales reps rap. "The competition just making noise. We're making history because we're great by choice."

The video is the latest eyebrow-raising piece of evidence in the trial, which has put a spotlight on the federal government's efforts to go after those it says are responsible for fueling the deadly drug crisis. The trial, which began last month, is expected to last several more weeks.

Last month, a former employee told jurors that she watched her

boss—regional sales manager Sunrise Lee—give a lap dance at a Chicago nightclub to a doctor Insys was pushing to write more prescriptions. Lee's lawyer said the doctor was taking advantage of her.

Beth Wilkinson, an attorney for Kapoor, told jurors that any criminal activity by Insys was orchestrated by Burlakoff. She has sought to portray Burlakoff and the government's other key witness, former CEO Michael Babich, as liars who are willing to say anything to take down Kapoor in the hopes of getting a lesser sentence.

Babich, who pleaded guilty in January, took the stand this week and said Kapoor pushed to get patients on higher doses so they would continue taking the drug, which meant more money for the company.

Babich told jurors that Insys looked for sales reps who were "poor, hungry and driven" or what they called "PHDs." Insys also recruited employees who were "easy on the eyes," Babich told jurors.

"No physician wanted a quote unquote unattractive person to walk in their door," he said.

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