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## Alkermes sees growth at local site



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Prescription for Growth:** The Alkermes pharmaceutical manufacturing facility in Wilmington employs about 400 people and is 200,000 square feet. The company has added 100 jobs in the past year as it grows its business.

### Firm has 400 workers at Wilmington facility

BY LAURA ENGLEHART  
DBJ STAFF REPORTER

While an opiate addiction epidemic continues to grip Ohio — with a 350 percent increase in deaths from unintentional prescription drug overdoses from 1999 to 2008 — a pharmaceutical company with regional operations has developed a monthly injection to alleviate drug dependence. If sales increase, the company could add more jobs locally, but that depends heavily on whether drug rehabilitation centers adopt the nascent treatment.

Based in Waltham, Mass., Alkermes Inc. has started producing Vivitrol — approved this past October by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to prevent relapses to dependence on opioids, such as morphine, codeine, oxycodone and heroin. The drug is made at Alkermes commercial manufactur-

ing facility in Wilmington.

About 400 employees work at the 200,000-square-foot plant. The company added about 100 jobs in the past year and a half to accommodate Vivitrol production and could add more, if sales increase, said Richard Pops, Alkermes chairman, president and CEO.

The company recently announced its plans to merge with Dublin, Ireland-based Elan Drug Technologies, a unit of Elan Corp., in a \$960 million deal that will combine the two companies under a new holding company incorporated in Ireland. The pending merger opens the door wide for business expansion, Pops said.

Meanwhile, Vivitrol sales continue to climb. In the second quarter of 2011, sales increased more than 175 percent from the previous quarter to \$9.7 million. Those numbers are modest, said company spokeswoman Jennifer Viera, but Alkermes continues to make gains in drug treatment centers.

To boost sales requires treatment centers to adopt a new opioid dependency treatment method, Pops said, and that could take some time.

"Part of it is that drug treatment centers are not used to using injectable prescription medicines," Pops said. "But the results are so good that it's worth it."

Currently, between 800 and 900 physicians prescribe Vivitrol. The drug works by blocking opioids from binding to brain, spinal cord and gastrointestinal tract receptors, eliminating their effects after patients go through a detoxification process.

Pops said Vivitrol is an important piece in the puzzle when it comes to combating nationwide spikes in opioid and prescription drug abuse, especially in Ohio.

Nationally, an estimated 2 million people are opioid dependent — nearly double the amount addicted to cocaine — and the U.S. consumes 80 percent of the world's opioid supply.

Nearly \$500 million is spent annually in the U.S. on expenses associated with medical, economic, social and criminal factors caused by addictive substance users,



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according to reports.

Ohio statistics show that between 1999 and 2008, overdose deaths where opiates were listed on death certificates increased about 350 percent. In the Dayton region, prescription opioids, with crack cocaine, heroin, sedative hypnotics and marijuana, were reported as the most prevalent drugs between June 2010 and January. The report was based on interviews with active and recovering drug abusers in treatment centers and compiled by the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services. Participants said in the six-month time frame that prescription opioids had become easier to obtain compared with the previous six months, presumably thanks to increased prescribing in hospitals, private physician offices and pain clinics. Additionally, a slow economy has more patients selling their pills for cash, participants said.

At The Ridge, a 14-bed upscale residential treatment center on a 51-acre site about 25 miles east of Cincinnati in Batavia Township, Dr. Jeffrey Stuckert has prescribed Vivitrol for three patients since the facility opened in February. In all cases, the injection was administered to patients dependent on alcohol — another FDA-approved use for the medication.

Stuckert, medical director of The Ridge and Northland, an outpatient rehabilitation facility in Milford, said the injection provides an advantage over oral medications in that it blocks euphoric sensations for an entire month so patients do not choose daily whether to take it.

"It takes away that temptation not to comply and that helps some people — knowing that for the next month there's no point in drinking or using," Stuckert said.

But that advantage quickly can turn into a burden, if a patient experiences a painful medical emergency. In that case,

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## ALKERMES: New drug aims to help fight prescription medicine additions and abuse

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Vivitrol can hinder pain management for ailments such as a broken bone, Stuckert said. The injection also is expensive, running between \$700 and \$1,200 per dose, but Alkermes provides a payment assistance program of up to \$500 per month for 13 months. The number of Vivitrol injections needed depends on the patient and averages six months to a year or longer.

Stuckert said many patients turn down the treatment for the cost. Others do not like the idea of an injection, he said.

The three patients who received Vivitrol injections at The Ridge relapsed within a month or two. But that number does not a

representative sample make, Stuckert said.

"We've only done three patients; it's not in large enough sample sizes to draw conclusions. I think you can safely say I've had mixed results," he said.

Patients who received Vivitrol likely thought the treatment would cure their alcohol dependence without a recovery program, Stuckert said.

Not only that, but it remains common for recovering drug and alcohol addicts to relapse. Stuckert ballparked at random that between 60 and 70 percent revert back to their old habits at some point in the treatment process.

"That's just the nature of the disease," he said.

In phase three clinical trials, results showed that patients treated once monthly with Vivitrol injections demonstrated higher rates of opioid-free urine screens, compared to patients treated with a placebo.

Whether it will catch on in rehabilitation centers remains unknown. With limited experience administering Vivitrol, Stuckert does not have an optimistic market outlook for the treatment.

"That's just my personal opinion. It's not a burgeoning market that's waiting to explode. I think it has a limited potential," he said.

Alkermes currently is working to develop other medications to treat alcohol and opioid dependencies, along with mental disorders and medical conditions.

The company has partnered with West Chester-based Amylin Pharmaceuticals Inc. and Eli Lilly & Co. on a type 2 diabetes treatment, Bydureon, which recently has shown positive results in Phase II clinical trials. The FDA plans to rule on whether to authorize the drug in early 2012. Amylin makes Bydureon at its \$500 million West Chester plant in Butler County.

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