

Hooked on painkillers, he turned to robbery

Harold Andres Jr., 'a broken and beaten man,' gets 4½ years

By [Laura McVicker](#)

Columbian staff writer

Harold Andres Jr. told a judge Thursday that his addiction to powerful painkillers spiraled out of control after he left the Payette Clinic. So he resorted to robbing pharmacies for a quick fix of oxycodone.

Thursday's result to his addiction: four years and seven months in prison.

The 48-year-old Vancouver man was sentenced by Clark County Superior Court Judge Diane Woolard after pleading guilty to three counts of first-degree robbery relating to a string of Safeway pharmacy robberies that began in April.

Andres has no prior felony criminal record, said his attorney, Steven Rucker.

"Clearly, the need for pain medication legally prescribed to him and overprescribed took over his life," Rucker said, referring to his client's history with the pain clinic.

Andres was a patient of the Payette Clinic. The pain clinic forfeited its ability to prescribe controlled substances in March, leaving some patients physically dependent on powerful narcotics. The clinic remains open.

The Vancouver-area clinic was linked to the overdose death of an 18-year-old Oregon high school senior who died in December after smoking an oxycodone pill originally prescribed to a Payette patient.

As part of a plea agreement, Rucker had asked the judge to sentence his client to four years; Senior Deputy Prosecutor John Fairgrieve had argued for five. The judge decided on a middle-ground sentence.

"This is a first-time offense and you've shown a great deal of remorse," Woolard said.

During most of the 30-minute hearing, Andres openly wept. When it was his turn to speak, he struggled with his words. Andres explained that his wife left him and moved to California in light of the charges.

"My addiction has cost me everything," he said. "I stand before you a broken and beaten man."

Andres was ordered by Woolard to undergo drug and alcohol treatment while incarcerated, and also to pay restitution totaling about \$13,600.

According to an affidavit filed by Fairgrieve, Andres robbed a Safeway pharmacy at 6700 N.E. 162nd Ave. on April 21, a Safeway pharmacy at 2615 N.E. 112th Ave. on May 5 and a Safeway pharmacy at 6711 N.E. 63rd St. on July 6.

A robbery charge relating to a Fred Meyer robbery June 22 was dropped in exchange for Andres' guilty plea.

In each robbery, a gunman asked solely for oxycodone or its brand name, Oxycontin, and made threatening statements such as, "Give me all your Oxycontin or I will blow your head off." In each case, he brandished a semi-automatic handgun.

In the May 5 robbery, the gunman told the employee she had 10 seconds to get him oxycodone. In the July 6 incident, the robber demanded Oxycontin and then counted backward from 20. After he was given the pills, he said, "If anyone comes out of here in the next three minutes, I'll shoot all of you," according to Fairgrieve's affidavit.

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