

Weighing *the* Risks



*Ozempic's Rise as a
Weight Loss Drug*



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2024

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Introduction

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Organization: Novo Nordisk

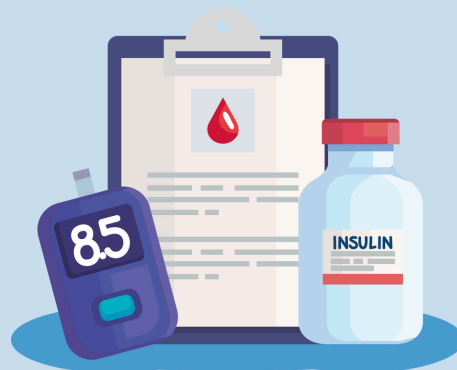
A Century of Global Health Impact

Organization Background

Novo Nordisk is a prominent international pharmaceutical group, with production sites in countries such as China, Russia, the United States, Japan, and many others (Novo Nordisk, 2024). It's original headquarters is currently located in Denmark, founded over a hundred years ago in



1923 and currently employing over fifty thousand individuals (Novo Nordisk, 2024). The company has produced many major drugs such as NoVoSeven and Fiasp, focusing on health issues such as diabetes and obesity (Novo Nordisk, 2024). The company has produced many major drugs such as NoVoSeven and Fiasp, focusing on health issues such as diabetes and obesity (Novo Nordisk, 2024).



Introduction

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Novo Nordisk

Balancing Sustainability & Innovation

Leadership & Values



The company is currently led by CEO and Danish businessman Lars Fruergaard Jørgensen since early 2017, with a mission to **“develop policy solutions that promote access to care for the patients we serve and facilitate continued innovation in the prevention and treatment of serious chronic diseases.”** (Novo Nordisk, 2024).

¹ Additionally, Novo Nordisk heavily values the concept of sustainability, both in its business practices and in maximizing patient lifespan (Novo Nordisk, 2024). The brand notes its value of innovation in the scientific field, focusing on major global health issues such as hemophilia, growth disorders, and as mentioned, diabetes (Novo Nordisk, 2024).

A Battle for Market Dominance

Competitors: Eli Lilly, Amgen, AstraZeneca

As prominent as many of their products, such as Ozempic, are in society as key products for health and weight loss, Novo Nordisk still faces significant rivalry in the medical industry. The company competes against other notable brands such as Eli Lilly, Amgen, and AstraZeneca, all organizations dedicated to similar missions of health like Novo Nordisk. Products such as Eli Lilly’s Mounjaro cause a notable concern for Novo Nordisk, as they are able to match and even exceed Ozempic’s and Wegovy’s weight-loss effects (Scripps, 2024). Simply put, despite the brand’s history and successful products, Novo Nordisk has and will continue to face significant obstacles when it comes to remaining a dominant figure in the medical marketplace.

Introduction

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Novo Nordisk

Ozempic: The Billion-Dollar Blockbuster

Key Products & Achievements

The brand is most well-known for its production of Semaglutide, the major active ingredient in more commonly known Ozempic and Wegovy (Novo Nordisk, 2024). Ozempic specifically has become a notable product globally, being

sanctioned for use by the United State's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2017 to help patients manage Type 2 Diabetes (UC Davis Health, 2024). Ozempic has become one of the most used and popular drugs in the U.S., with its millions of users making it a core product of Novo Nordisk (DeSilver, 2024).



Novo Nordisk has made \$13.8 billion in revenue from Semaglutide-based products such as Ozempic alone, showcasing its immense demand from many audiences (Mundell, 2024). In fact, influenced by the emerging trends of weight loss orientation, Ozempic has shown to be a staple for the brand, with over 40% of all of Novo Nordisk's 2023 revenue directly coming from the drug (Track Drugs, 2024). However, this immense popularity has also caused major shortages of the product and similar ones, as demand outweighs supply (Reuters, 2024).

Introduction

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Ozempic Redefining Weight Loss and Diabetes Care

Repurposing Ozempic's Role

Case Background

In 2005, the FDA approved glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists; which is a category of drugs created to treat diabetes and obesity. As previously stated, GLP-1 drugs were not made specifically for weight loss. However, as studies continued, the dual benefit of diabetes and weight management became significantly apparent. The first GLP-1 receptor agonist, exenatide, was approved by the FDA in 2005 for diabetes management. Subsequent research revealed the potential of these agents in promoting weight loss, leading to the approval of liraglutide (Saxenda) specifically for obesity in 2014, and more recently, semaglutide (Wegovy) in 2021 (Muddobalaiah, 2024).

The Evolution of Weight Loss

Case Background



Other weight loss drugs existed before the repurposing of diabetic drugs. Orlistat was the first agent in the lipase inhibitor class of antiobesity drugs (Lucas and Kaplan-Machlis). Drugs such as Orlistat aid in weight loss. The difference between weight loss drugs like Orlistat and Ozempic is the way the drugs perform in the body. The rationale for exploring GLP-1 receptor agonists for weight management lies in their multifaceted mechanism of action. These agents not only enhance insulin secretion and inhibit glucagon release but also slow gastric emptying and promote satiety [15-18]. The combination of effects results

in reduced caloric intake and significant weight loss (Muddobalaiah, 2024). Orlistat (tetrahydrolipstatin) is an inhibitor of pancreatic and other lipases. As a pancreatic lipase inhibitor, it acts in the gastrointestinal lumen and is indicated for use in obesity (McNeely, 1998). Orlistat prompts weight loss but at a slower rate and less effectively. This ineffectiveness created the need for a better weight-loss drug.

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Ozempic Redefining Weight Loss and Diabetes Care

The Evolution of Weight Loss

Case Background

Pharmacotherapy options, such as orlistat, phentermine-topiramate, and naltrexone-bupropion, have been employed to assist with weight loss. Despite their efficacy, these medications can be associated with adverse effects and are not universally effective for all patients. Bariatric surgery, including procedures like gastric bypass and sleeve gastrectomy, offers significant and sustained weight loss but is invasive and comes with its own set of risks and potential complications (Muddobalaiah, 2024).

Ozempic shifted the weight loss industry because of its effectiveness, popularity and non-invasive approach. The management of obesity involves a multi-faceted approach, combining lifestyle interventions, pharmacotherapy, and, in severe cases, bariatric surgery. Lifestyle modifications, including diet, exercise, and behavioral therapy, form the cornerstone of obesity management (Muddobalaiah, 2024). Lifestyle changes in obesity management yield temporary results because of this anti-obesity drugs were introduced to the pharmaceutical industry.

Ozempic Boom Sparks Shortage

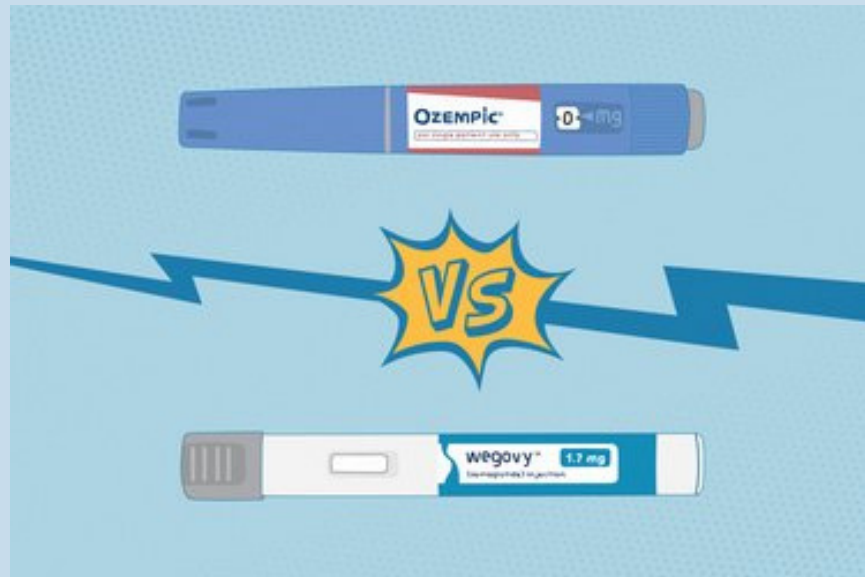
Case Overview

Though Wegovy is Novo Nordisk's FDA-approved weight loss drug, people have been turning to Ozempic for weight loss management since it is easier to get the drug prescribed for off-label use. The use of Ozempic for weight loss has caused a surge in demand for the drug and has led to a shortage in supply (Reed, 2024). Those who use Ozempic for diabetic purposes are now unable to receive the drug due to its rapid increase in popularity.

Introduction

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Case: Ozempic Redefining Weight Loss and Diabetes Care



Side Effects, Suits, & Shortages

Case Overview

An additional aspect that has been noted by those using Ozempic is unexpected side effects that include intestinal blockages, gastroparesis (stomach paralysis), vision loss and in extreme cases death (Llc, 2024). Consumers are filing lawsuits against Novo Nordisk for not disclosing these possible side effects on the drug's prescription label (Llc, 2024).

On August 2nd, 2023, the first lawsuit was filed against Ozempic and Wegovy for failure to properly warn users about the potential risks (Ozempic Lawsuit - October 2024 Update | King Law, 2024). Since then over a hundred other lawsuits have been filed and were consolidated into a multidistrict litigation in December 2023.

Introduction

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Ozempic Redefining Weight Loss and Diabetes Care

Key Moments Unveiled

Case Overview: Timeline

- **2017:** Ozempic is approved by the FDA for the treatment of type 2 diabetes (Han et al., 2024.)
- **2021-2022:** Reports of significant weight loss as a side effect of Ozempic begin to circulate in medical journals and forums (Han et al., 2024, Ruder, 2023).
- **2022:** Media influencers and celebrities begin promoting Ozempic for weight loss, leading to viral trends on social media platforms (Han et al., 2024).
- **2023:** Media outlets report on the growing demand for Ozempic, with focus shifting to its off-label use for weight loss (Ruder, 2023).
- **Early 2023:** Novo Nordisk faces supply shortages as demand for Ozempic exceeds expectations, causing difficulties for diabetic patients who rely on the drug (Weiser, 2024).
- **Mid-2023:** Public health experts raise concerns about off-label Ozempic use and risks for non-diabetic patients (Han et al., 2024; Kate Ruder, 2023). The first lawsuit against Novo Nordisk is filed in August (Orent & Couch, 2024).
- **Late 2023:** Novo Nordisk addresses supply shortages and reaffirms the drug's approved use, signaling potential FDA approval for weight management (Han et al., 2024; Patricia Weiser, 2024). In December, lawsuits are consolidated into a multidistrict litigation case (Orent & Couch, 2024).

Communication and Business Actions

Novo Nordisk Tackles Obesity

Organization Communication

“**Our purpose is to drive change to defeat serious chronic diseases, built upon our heritage in diabetes (Who We Are, 2024).**”

For years Novo Nordisk has been fighting against chronic illness. They do this through pioneering scientific breakthroughs, making medicines more accessible and ultimately curing the diseases they treat (Who We Are, 2024). For over 100 years Novo Nordisk has been responsible for producing over half the world’s insulin, and has spent 25 years researching the obesity issue (Nelson & Fuente, 2024).

In 2018 Novo Nordisk partnered with leading obesity organizations to establish the Obesity Policy Engagement Network (Novo Nordisk® Is Committed to the Management of Obesity | Rethink Obesity®, 2023). When this change came about, Novo Nordisk claimed they wanted to stop weight bias and help people reclaim their wellness (Driving Change in Obesity | Novo Nordisk U.S., 2024). They launched these initiatives with the help of established partners like the Obesity Care Advocacy Network or the Obesity Action Coalition and with campaigns like It’s Bigger Than Me that included celebrity Queen Latifah (Driving Change in Obesity | Novo Nordisk U.S., 2023).



Novo Nordisk Tackles Obesity

Organization Communication

On October 8th, 2024, the company announced a new weight loss initiative called The Childhood Obesity Prevention Initiative. The initiative will support six urban communities in Denmark by implementing and evaluating solutions based on exercise and healthy eating (News Details, n.d.).
Katrine DiBona,

Global Head of Sustainability & Public Affairs at Novo Nordisk explained that “With a focus on disadvantaged urban communities, the Childhood Obesity Prevention Initiative will provide important evidence and a unique data-led framework to support city leaders in preventing childhood obesity.”

Ozempic’s Rise: Brand Response

Organization Communication

With the company shifting to include obesity cures, semaglutide, the main ingredient in the type 2 diabetes drug Ozempic, was FDA approved in Wegovy for weight loss. The shortage of Wegovy lead to some doctors prescribing Ozempic off-label, which lead to a shortage of Ozempic resulting in prices rising. Ozempic did not communicate a verbal response to this surge in popularity but they did take action to accommodate the new attention. One of these actions is the expansion of their operations.

Novo Nordisk put more than \$6 million dollars towards expanding their manufacturing facilities by purchasing three new sites in 2024 (Nelson & Fuente, 2024). The company is attempting to become more international by purchasing manufacturing sites from Catalent, a large pharmaceutical company (Fick & Wingrove, 2024). These new manufacturing sites are in Anagni, Italy, Brussels, Belgium and Bloomington, Indiana (Fick & Wingrove, 2024). In addition to this, Novo Nordisk has hired over 10,000 employees globally (Nelson & Fuente, 2024).

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Communication and Business Actions

Ozempic's Rise: Brand Response

Organization Communication

Another action that the company took during this time was their continuation of their many fundraising efforts. Novo Nordisk has an extensive history of creating campaigns and raising funds and awareness for the diseases they are treating, this action did not stop with their rise in popularity. After Ozempic became the go to weight drug, Novo Nordisk continued creating campaigns for social responsibility. An example of this is the company partnering with the Coalition for Healthy Food in Newark Schools in early August of 2024 (Novo Nordisk, 2024). The Coalition was able to apply for a grant with the company that allowed them to work together to give their students access to healthier eating options on school campuses (Novo Nordisk, 2024). This will be a three year partnership with the goal of implementing several different initiatives and programs to help further the Coalition's mission (Novo Nordisk, 2024). This shows that the company become widely popular did not affect their overall interactions with the public.



Stakeholder Response

Rising Demand, Growing Burden

Internal Stakeholders: Employees

To meet the market's soaring demand for Ozempic, Novo Nordisk maximized production, investing over **\$2 billion** to expand relevant facilities (GlobeNewswire, 2023). In response to this notable increase, many employees felt an **immense level of stress** to maximize their work production and efficiency to meet the increased demand (Edmond, 2024).

This stress was especially taxing and off-putting due to the employee's typically healthy and relaxed work environment (Rasmussen & Fuente, 2023).



Novo Nordisk's CEO, Lars Fruergaard Jørgensen himself, noted employee stress due to the increased demand for Ozempic, commenting that 14% of workers reported stress symptoms last year (Kresge, 2024).

This percentage was seen by Jørgensen as too extreme to consider acceptable

“ —

I don't think you can run a company if more than 10% of employees are suffering from stress, (Kresge, 2024).

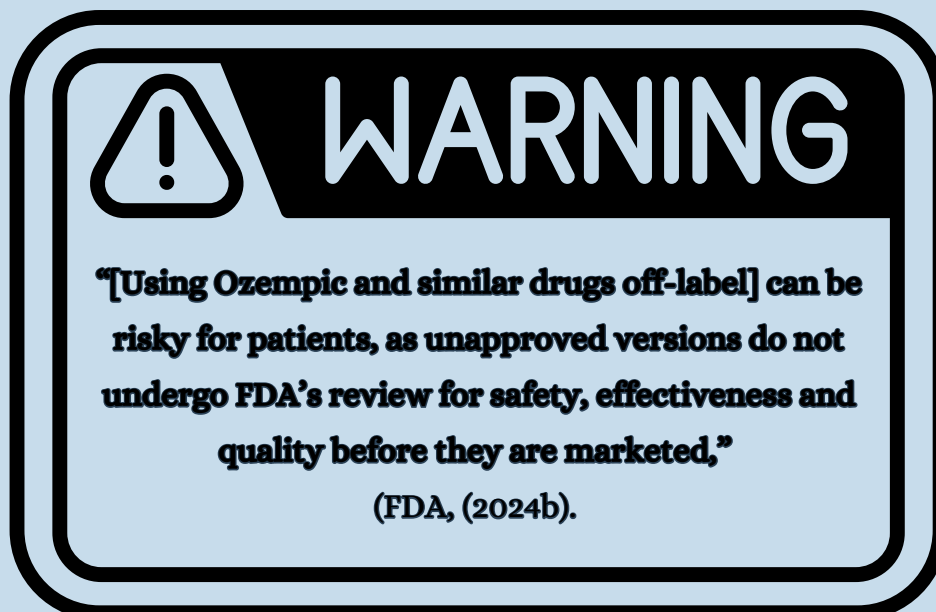
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Stakeholder Response

Profit or Sustainability?

Internal Stakeholders: Research & Development

Next came the responses of the supporting research and development team and leadership groups for Novo Nordisk, also having to deal with the overwhelming stress of massive demand increases (Edmond, 2024). Additionally, both groups also had to specifically deal with the ethical and legal concerns and expectations from major regulatory bodies such as the Therapeutic Goods Administration due to the product's new and unapproved weight-loss-oriented use (Hargreaves, 2024). However, the most extreme pressure faced by the research and development team was from the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA), as the regulatory body held and continues to hold higher and higher standards for the use and promotion of the drug, persistently warning audiences.



Loud Praise, Loud Criticism

External Stakeholders: General Media & Celebrities

As in all cases, the media was one of the major external stakeholders, giving the brand and its product's effects significant mainstream and niche coverage. The case was discussed and broadcast at length via a blend of social media influencers, mainstream news outlets, celebrity endorsements, and regulatory bodies, all either promoting Ozempic's significant support in weight loss or criticizing the drug's possible and apparent health effects.

Many celebrities endorsed the medication, either through indirect use or directly promoting it, such as Elon Musk's elaboration on its place in his health regimen, seeing it as a gift with his Christmas quote, **"Like Cocaine Bear, but Santa and Ozempic,"** and Jeremy Clarkson's explanation of the product's ease of use and effectiveness (Smith, 2023; The Economic Times, 2025).



However, many celebrities fostered new opinions over time despite originally positive results. Prominent figures such as Chelsea Handler initially noted the extreme ease of receiving the medication and the desirable results coming from its use, stating,

“——
|
"I didn't even know I was on it.
If you ever want to drop five [pounds], this is good,”
|
——”

Handler then later denounced the medication, citing health concerns and a lack of long-term effectiveness, even commenting that her doctor would **"hand it out to anybody"** without their awareness (Smith, 2023; Etienne, 2023).

Loud Praise, Loud Criticism

External Stakeholders: General Media & Celebrities

It's crucial to note that despite the overwhelming amount of intense coverage and the clear potential for misinformation to spread, there was a lack of significant response or initiatives from Novo Nordisk to counteract these celebrity-driven narratives (Tahir & Norman, 2023). This type of reactive approach opened up the floor for misinformation to dominate most public discussions, which further complicated audiences' perceptions of Ozempic's intended use and safety (Tahir & Norman, 2023).

Contrastingly, celebrities weren't the only stakeholders to have conflicting views on the case, as most major news outlets had similarly mixed reactions to Ozempic's off-label use. Outlets such as Healthline and Mayo Clinic elaborated on how useful the medicine was for major weight loss and the exact process the drug had in a patient's body (Preszler, 2024; Cassata, 2024).

Additionally, major talk shows such as The View, promoted Ozempic and its use, minimizing the possible threats the drug had, with host Joy Behar commenting that

“**[Ozempic's] side effects are not horrible,**”

influencing millions to misinterpret the drug's full impact (Nava, 2024).

However, outlets such as Science News and The New York Post denounced Ozempic's off-label use despite its effectiveness, claiming that the product's long-term health effects were still unknown and could have a lasting negative impact on unintended users, commenting that **“It's still early days; We've got a lot of research to do,”** (Smith, 2023; Rosen, 2023).

Stakeholder Response

Demand vs. Ethics

External Stakeholders: Medical Professionals

Similar to the media, most medical professionals have found themselves with mixed opinions on Ozempic and Novo Nordisk. Many professionals report being overwhelmed by the significant increase in demand for Ozempic due to the drug's growing coverage on social and mainstream media (Scott, 2023).

In response, many medical professionals have acted as facilitators to Ozempic's increasing demand and usage, prescribing the drug to those who aren't its originally intended users, but instead those interested in its weight-loss properties. On the other hand, just as many medical professionals have acted as critics of Ozempic and Novo Nordisk, spreading awareness of the drug's side effects, lack of permanence, and its popularity's effect on intended users. Many professionals in the field have elaborated on their fear regarding patients' lack of understanding and awareness of the true consequences of beginning Ozempic for weight loss (Scott, 2023). Claudia Fox, a representative of Minnesota Medical School, explained:

**"[Ozempic's continuously needed usage is] a big pill to swallow:
My kid may potentially be on this medication for life.
[They] will likely need some sort of treatment for life.
We're not curing it.
We're treating it.
We're managing it,"**

(Scott, 2023).

Demand vs. Ethics

External Stakeholders: Medical Professionals

Additionally, many professionals cite that there's a deeper societal problem occurring, causing the massive demand increase that isn't being addressed but is instead being exacerbated by brands like Novo Nordisk and its products, questioning the brand's true value to society (Cantor, 2024).



“

“There's also a risk that the excitement about these new medications might overshadow crucial public health efforts focused on prevention and lifestyle changes,”

”

notes psychiatry professor Dr. Klitzman, revealing the depth of the impact Ozempic and other similar drugs are having culturally (Cantor, 2024).

Weight Loss or Health Risk?

External Stakeholders: Off-Label Users

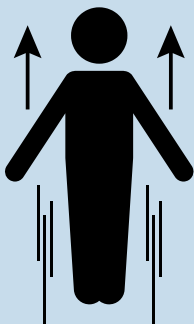
Many off-label users of Ozempic also had mixed reactions to Ozempic, as the product's effects could vary significantly depending on the length of use and patient. Many new users relished the massive weight loss the drug offered, explaining in detail how successful the drug was for them (Drugs.com, 2024).

Countless reports of Ozempic's positive effects came through, revealing how Ozempic played a multitude of beneficial roles for users (Arillotta et al., 2023).



“My mental health has improved dramatically,”

“This medicine is a game changer for people battling obesity,”



“Semaglutide felt like what people SAY antidepressants are supposed to feel like,”

Stakeholder Response

Weight Loss or Health Risk?

External Stakeholders: Off-Label Users

However, many users were extended patients and felt its negative symptoms, inconsistent long-term effectiveness and even mental health crises (Etienne, 2024; Popsugar, 2024). Soon, in equal volume, contrasting accounts came to light:

"This IMMEDIATELY threw my hormones and emotions into a downward spiral. I'm infuriated that they don't list anxiety and depression as an official side effect yet it's all over the internet,"



"I was 180 [pounds] and lost 30 [pounds]. When I got off of it, I gained it all back due to anxiety and depression. It was impossible for me to continue eating portions that small when the side effects wore off,"

revealing the drug's true consequences and patients' lack of awareness despite its internet fame (Arillotta et al., 2023). Despite all of these responses and the drug's risks, there was a significant lack of response from Novo Nordisk, with little educational efforts to bring awareness to the specifics of Ozempic and mitigate misinformation.

Stakeholder Response

Those Left Behind

External Stakeholders: On-Label Users

Despite major support and praise from many, even more stakeholders have had criticisms and complaints about Novo Nordisk and Ozempic's off-label use. A major displeased stakeholder group was made up of those who were meant to be the original and exclusive users of Ozempic, type-2 diabetes patients.

Many were frustrated with Novo Nordisk's lack of preparation and off-label users' purchase of the drug, as they found themselves no longer able to access the medication they needed to regulate their health, specifically commenting on the brand's strong promotion,

“**They should have been prepared to meet demand given their very aggressive advertising campaigns,**”

(Lupkin, 2024).

These frustrations led to the development of diabetic advocacy groups and even lawsuits against Novo Nordisk (Alltucker, 2024; Diabetes UK, 2024). While Ozempic has risen to popularity seemingly overnight, it has caused people with type 2 diabetes to feel

frustrated, as one on-label user expressed, **“It really makes me mad; it infuriates me. We need it to stay alive and keep functioning on an everyday basis,”** (Lovelace et al., 2023).

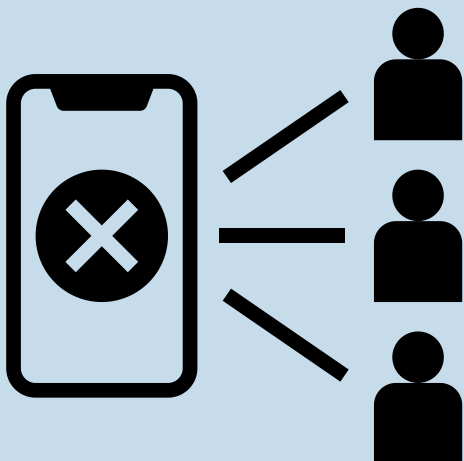
Some people with this chronic illness have taken to blaming the manufacturer for the shortage rather than those who are taking it for weight loss but it is still an issue (Lovelace et al., 2023).

#Ozempic: Going Viral

External Stakeholders: Social Media

Where Ozempic and its weight-loss effects truly were most sensationalized and praised was via social media, specifically TikTok. Many major users such as Kim Carlos and Rachel Knight Gullette were delighted with the drug's effects and encouraged its use, influencing millions of users' understandings of the product (Bushak, 2024).

Content with lines such as, **“My name is Rachel, I have lost 165 pounds. And the only conscious lifestyle modification that I have made is taking a shot every seven days,”** positioned Ozempic as an easy, extremely effective ‘hack’ in the minds of the public instead of a serious medication with many possible risks (Bushak, 2024). Additionally, the notable hashtag #Ozempic had over a billion views, showcasing the immense popularity of the drug and its discussion (Alfred, 2024).



However, it was found that much of the positive commentary and advice given regarding Ozempic and its effects were from unreliable and non-professional sources (Basch et al., 2023). This revealed that social media platforms were a breeding ground for misinformation and outdated knowledge that many audiences would take as gospel and implement into their own personal usage of the drug. However, despite this prevalent situation, Novo Nordisk neglected to take any sort of action to mitigate these narratives.

Flagging Health Risks

External Stakeholders: Regulatory Bodies

Another notable stakeholder criticizing Ozempic's off-label use and Novo Nordisk's promotion were major regulatory bodies such as the United States Food & Drugs Administration (FDA) and the United Kingdom's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).



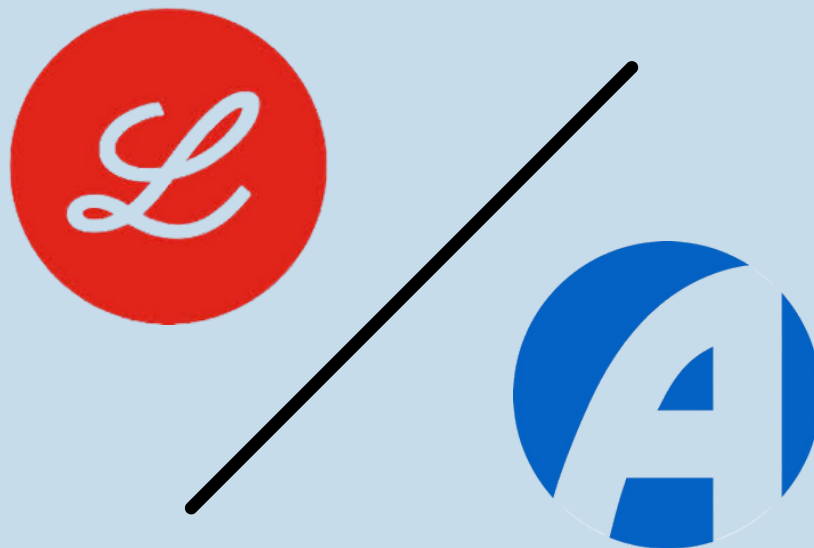
These bodies and many others specifically warned against the use of Ozempic for non-diabetic patients, noting the major health side effects, permanent symptoms, and over-dependence on weight loss (Lewis, 2024). Some even specifically brought attention to the major illnesses and deaths of many misusing and overusing Ozempic (Stout, 2024). This concern has meant that Novo Nordisk, its products, and counterfeit drugs are being kept under the watchful eye of these bodies, specifically the FDA (FDA, 2023; FDA, 2024).



Rivals Seize the Moment

External Stakeholders: Competitors

Finally, competitors offer a unique response to Ozempic's increasing demand and controversy, seeing it as a major opportunity. Many weight-loss-drug-oriented competitors to Novo Nordisk have decided to take advantage of the growing concerns, shortages, and side effects of Ozempic, pushing the promotion of their own similar products. Brands such as Eli Lilly, Amgen, and others are emphasizing more than ever their desirable features, such as availability, cost-efficiency, and minimum side effects, creating a major threat for Novo Nordisk of overtaking Ozempic's popularity, especially when considering Novo Nordisk's lack of preparation for major demand and health risks (Mullin, 2024; Twenter, 2024).



These brands revealed extremely desirable results, with reports highlighting outcomes such as **“20% of body weight lost,”** **“-safe and well-tolerated,”** and more, showcasing that Novo Nordisk must overcome consistently increasing challenges to keep its dominant market position (Gatlin & Carson, 2024).

Financial Gains, Public Backlash, and Societal Shifts

Surge in Revenue & Reach

Financial Implications

Ozempic's off-label use for weight management has significantly boosted Novo Nordisk's revenue. By early 2024, combined with its FDA-approved counterpart Wegovy, Ozempic drove Novo Nordisk's revenue to \$26.4 billion, marking a 28% annual increase (Pew Research Center, 2024.) The rapid adoption of Ozempic for weight loss has set Novo Nordisk apart as a leader in both diabetes and weight management markets. Rivals like Eli Lilly have responded with similar products, escalating competition and spurring Novo Nordisk to increase its marketing and R&D spending to sustain its advantage (Scripps, 2024.)

The off-label popularity of Ozempic has also fueled a 40% rise in Novo Nordisk's stock price over the last fiscal year, demonstrating investor confidence in the drug's potential. In August 2023, Novo Nordisk's market value surpassed \$300 billion, surpassing Denmark's entire GDP and reflecting its dominance in obesity treatment (Financial Times, 2023.) Eli Lilly, too, saw gains with Mounjaro's release, while companies outside this market, like Pfizer and Moderna, experienced declines, underscoring the competitive shifts driven by Ozempic's success (Financial Times, 2023.)



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Financial Gains, Public Backlash, and Societal Shifts

Surge in Revenue & Reach

Financial Implications



The off-label use of Ozempic has also financially strained the healthcare system, particularly affecting insurance providers. Many insurers initially covered Ozempic for diabetes management, but the drug's rising popularity for weight loss has led to increased claims and spending. According to the National Association of Health Underwriters, Ozempic's list price of approximately \$1,000 per month has caused some insurers to reconsider reimbursement policies for non-diabetic users and restrict coverage (National Association of Health Underwriters, 2023.)

With weight-related healthcare costs reaching \$173 billion annually in the U.S., the demand for effective obesity treatments is clear. However, widespread adoption of Ozempic or similar drugs for weight management could dramatically inflate healthcare costs (Financial Times, 2023.) The rise in prescriptions for weight management has created challenges for diabetic patients who rely on Ozempic, especially as demand exceeds supplies, prompting calls for greater regulatory oversight of off-label drug use (American Hospital Association, 2024.)

Novo Nordisk has invested \$2 billion to expand Ozempic's production facilities globally to meet demand, yet supply shortages persist. Designed originally for a smaller diabetic market, the company's production and distribution channels have struggled to scale production (Novo Nordisk, 2024.) While Novo Nordisk's increased spending on production and shipping has offset some revenue gains, it has faced ongoing shortages, which the company expects to continue. The company's September 2023 earnings call revealed that Ozempic shortages are expected to continue into 2024 (Reuters, 2023.)

Implications

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Financial Gains, Public Backlash, and Societal Shifts

Legal and Consumer Risks

Financial Implications

The off-label use of Ozempic for weight loss has brought legal risks that may affect Novo Nordisk's financial outlook. Reports of adverse side effects, including gastrointestinal issues and gallbladder problems, have led to lawsuits from patients who claim the company failed to adequately warn about potential risks associated with non-diabetic use.



By late 2023, over 150 lawsuits had been filed, with potential for more if cases escalate to class-action status (Motley Rice, 2023; AMA, 2024.) Legal costs from these claims may impact Novo Nordisk's stability and investor confidence. Additionally, the FDA may take regulatory action to limit non-diabetic prescriptions, which could reduce revenue if tighter controls on Ozempic's use for weight loss are enacted (Motley Rice, 2023.)

Market Demand & Media Coverage

Reputational Implications

The unexpected surge in demand for Ozempic as a weight-loss solution has created considerable media attention. Ozempic prescriptions, particularly those for off-label use, have increased dramatically. According to data from health analytics firm IQVIA, prescriptions for semaglutide rose by nearly 200% in the past year, with many patients seeking it for weight-loss benefits (IQVIA, 2024.) As media coverage and online discussions around Ozempic continue to grow, they not only shape public perception but also place Novo Nordisk in a difficult position as it attempts to balance market demand with its initial focus on diabetes management (Financial Times, 2023.)

Implications

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Financial Gains, Public Backlash, and Societal Shifts

Novo Nordisk: Ethics & Dilemmas

Reputational Implications

Novo Nordisk has faced reputational challenges as record-breaking profits from Ozempic's popularity have drawn scrutiny, especially regarding off-label use and patient access. While the company states it does not encourage off-label use, it introduced Wegovy, a similar drug specifically approved for weight loss, to meet demand, raising ethical concerns over prioritizing profit (Financial Times, 2023; Pew Research Center, 2024.) The American Medical Association (AMA) has expressed concern about the industry's focus on aesthetic drug uses over essential health needs amid shortages. Critics argue that Novo Nordisk's aggressive marketing of Wegovy, priced similarly to Ozempic, suggests profit takes precedence over ethical healthcare (AMA, 2023.) With Wegovy's high cost and limited insurance coverage, this also raises healthcare costs and limits access for low-income groups. Additionally, Novo Nordisk's reputation as a leader in diabetes treatment has been questioned, with critics describing its response to Ozempic shortages as reactive, impacting access for diabetic patients (Novo Nordisk, 2024.)

Backlash Over Medication Inequity

Reputational Implications

Public trust has further weakened as diabetes advocacy groups and healthcare professionals argue that Novo Nordisk could have better prioritized diabetic patients in its distribution. The American Diabetes Association highlighted the ethical responsibility of pharmaceutical companies to ensure medications remain accessible for intended patients, urging stricter distribution policies (American Diabetes Association, 2024.)



Implications

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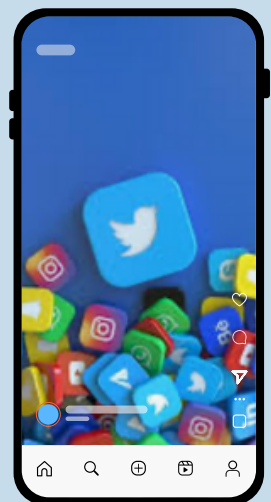
Financial Gains, Public Backlash, and Societal Shifts

Off-Label Use Fueling Scarcity

Societal Implications

The demand for Ozempic as a weight-loss drug has caused supply shortages, affecting diabetes patients who rely on it for blood glucose management. A 2023 Reuters report highlighted how off-label prescriptions for weight loss have led to shortages that prevent diabetic patients from accessing necessary treatments (Reuters, 2023.) Pharmacies have struggled with backorders, with the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) consistently reporting supply issues (ASHP, 2023.) This shortage presents an ethical issue: while Ozempic offers weight management benefits, its diversion compromises care for those with diabetes. Lower-income individuals are particularly impacted, as they may lack resources to pursue alternative, often pricier medications (AMA, 2023.)

Moral relativism can be applied to this situation as there appears to be no absolute moral truth, it is all based on the cultural context. In the current culture it is not abnormal for people to use medication to look a certain way, so some may not blame those who took Ozempic for weight loss. Or some may blame the doctors who prescribed Ozempic or some may understand that they are having to deal with the shortage as well. Some may blame the manufacturer or understand that the high demand of the product came out of nowhere. There is nothing in this situation that everyone can agree on as completely wrong or right. It is all relative.



Implications

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Financial Gains, Public Backlash, and Societal Shifts

Social Media & Public Perception

Societal Implications

Social media has also played a vital role in Ozempic's transition from a diabetes medication to a popular weight-loss solution. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram have contributed to the drug's popularity, with influencers, celebrities, and everyday users posting about their rapid weight loss results. The Wall Street Journal reported that TikTok videos mentioning Ozempic had received over 300 million views by early 2024 (Wall Street Journal, 2024.) This viral phenomenon has contributed to Ozempic's image as a "miracle drug" for weight loss.



A study published in the Journal of Medical Internet Research also revealed that over 45% of social media posts regarding Ozempic lacked accurate medical information, with many users unaware of the drug's intended purpose and possible risks (Journal of Medical Internet Research, 2023.) Health experts warn that normalizing pharmaceutical solutions for weight loss may inadvertently diminish the importance of sustainable lifestyle changes and the mental health aspects of weight management, further embedding harmful societal standards around body image and self-worth (AHA, 2023.) Social media has amplified these concerns, with patients and advocacy groups voicing frustration. Sentiment analysis from Brandwatch reveals a notable increase in negative sentiment toward Novo Nordisk, particularly from diabetic patients struggling to obtain their medication (Brandwatch, 2024.)

Financial Gains, Public Backlash, and Societal Shifts

Medicalized Weight Loss Concerns

Societal Implications



Additionally, the trend of using Ozempic and similar drugs for weight loss represents a shift toward medicalizing weight management over behavioral interventions. Experts from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health caution that relying on drugs like Ozempic for weight loss could undermine public health initiatives focused on lifestyle-based solutions. Emphasizing quick fixes could divert attention from obesity's root causes, such as diet, socioeconomic factors, and mental health (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2024.)

The long-term side effects of Ozempic as a weight-loss drug are largely unknown, as the drug was initially designed for diabetes management. The Mayo Clinic lists known side effects of semaglutide, Ozempic's active ingredient, including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and possible thyroid tumors, but the effects for those using it solely for weight loss are not yet fully understood (Mayo Clinic, 2023.) Experts warn that this off-label use without comprehensive oversight could lead to unforeseen adverse effects. Dr. Katherine O'Brien, an endocrinologist at Johns Hopkins Medicine, stresses the need for long-term trials, stating, "the body's response to prolonged GLP-1 manipulation is not fully understood, particularly in those without type 2 diabetes" Long-term GLP-1 receptor agonist use may heighten the risk of pancreatitis and gallbladder disease (Johns Hopkins Medicine, 2023.) A 2024 New England Journal of Medicine report also warns that dependency on semaglutide can lead to rapid weight regain and metabolic issues upon discontinuation, further complicating its use in non-diabetic populations (New England Journal of Medicine, 2024.)

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