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Harsh Reality of 'Osbournes' No Laughing Matter
The hit show's star says he was 'wiped out' on drugs ordered by a physician investigated for overprescribing for others.

By Chuck Philips
Times Staff Writer

December 7, 2003

Week after week, viewers tuning in to the hit reality series "The Osbournes" saw the star of the show in a perpetual stupor.

With cameras rolling, Ozzy Osbourne fell on his backside into the surf off Malibu. He passed out during a party at the Beverly Hills Hotel. He struggled to swat a fly in his dining room - only to slap himself in the face.

The sight of the aging rocker staggering around his Beverly Hills mansion, glassy-eyed and mumbling, became a staple of the MTV series last season.

The cause of Osbourne's disorientation was never explained. It turns out he was on Valium - and Dexedrine, Mysoline, Adderall and a host of other powerful medications. They were all prescribed by a Beverly Hills physician who, unknown to Osbourne, was under investigation for overprescribing drugs to other celebrity patients.

Prescription records show that Dr. David A. Kipper had Osbourne on an array of potent drugs - opiates, tranquilizers, amphetamines, antidepressants, even an antipsychotic.

The singer said he swallowed as many as 42 pills a day.

"I was wiped out on pills," said Osbourne, who fired Kipper in September, more than a year after becoming his patient. "I couldn't talk. I couldn't walk. I could barely stand up. I was lumbering about like the Hunchback of Notre Dame. It got to the point where I was scared to close my eyes at night - afraid I might not wake up."

The state medical board last week moved to revoke Kipper's license, accusing him of gross negligence in his treatment of other patients.

Osbourne, who has battled substance abuse for decades, sought Kipper's help last year in kicking a dependence on prescription narcotics. Kipper administered a 10-day detoxification treatment. Osbourne was grateful. Then his wife, Sharon, was diagnosed with cancer, and the rocker's relationship with Kipper took a new turn.

Kipper began writing prescriptions for a broad range of medications he said would alleviate Osbourne's anxiety and depression over his wife's illness. The number and potency of the drugs grew steadily, records show. At one point, Osbourne was on 13 different medications.

Medical experts who reviewed Osbourne's prescription records at The Times' request described the drug regimen as extreme.

Although they said they could not make definitive judgments without examining Osbourne and knowing his medical history, the doctors said the battery of medications prescribed by Kipper appeared excessive for any patient.

"The amount and potency of drugs being prescribed to this patient was outrageous," said Dr. Greg Thompson, an associate professor of clinical pharmacy at USC Medical School and director of the Drug Information Center at County USC Medical Center.

Dr. Drew Pinsky, medical director of the chemical dependency program at Las Encinas Hospital in Pasadena, said the regimen was especially risky for someone like Osbourne.

"This was an extreme amount of medication for a doctor to prescribe to a patient with an addiction history," Pinsky said. "On my chemical unit, patients like this are not allowed to be exposed to any of these kinds of addictive drugs."

Kipper, 55, declined to be interviewed. In a statement, he said that "ethical and medical privacy laws" barred him from discussing patient care.

"I have only good wishes for Mr. Osbourne and for his family and for their good health," the statement said.

The doctor's attorney, John D. Harwell, declined to comment beyond saying: "I can tell you that virtually every allegation you are reporting is inaccurate, incomplete, or . false."

Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne described their dealings with Kipper in a series of interviews by phone and at their six-bedroom, Spanish-style mansion above Sunset Boulevard. They made available prescription records and the doctor's invoices, along with credit card receipts and photocopied checks documenting their payments.

The Osbournes said Kipper had won their confidence and had become a regular presence at their home. He accompanied Ozzy on tour and appeared in several episodes of "The Osbournes."

After Sharon was diagnosed with colon cancer last year, Kipper prescribed anti-anxiety medications for her and installed a team of nurses at the couple's home to care for her.

"It's like we let him just take over our lives," Sharon Osbourne said. "We didn't do anything without telling him."

Kipper charged the couple \$650,000 for his services from June 2002 until they fired him three months ago, records show. The medications he prescribed cost them an additional \$58,000.

Rapid Rehab Treatment

Kipper, a UCLA-trained internist, is not certified as a specialist in addiction medicine or psychiatry. He practices from an office on Lasky Drive in Beverly Hills, next to the posh Peninsula Hotel, and owns an estate above Beverly Glen.

He often socializes with his clients, who include entertainment executives, actors, producers and musicians. Kipper carries a Screen Actors Guild card and has had bit parts in several films, including "As Good As It Gets," "Jackass - the Movie" and "Shallow Hal."

In Hollywood circles, he is known for offering speedy and painless addiction therapy in luxury hotel suites or in patients' homes. Kipper has used a combination of drugs to wean addicts off narcotics. Key to the treatment is buprenorphine, a powerful synthetic opiate that spares patients the agony of withdrawal.

Some celebrities have preferred Kipper's method to conventional drug rehab at licensed facilities, which can take months and requires years of follow-up therapy.

But addiction experts say treatments such as Kipper's offer only temporary relief because they do not address the underlying causes of addiction or provide the sustained psychological support needed to overcome a drug habit.

State authorities began investigating Kipper in 1998 after The Times reported that he was detoxifying celebrity addicts in luxury bungalows at the Peninsula.

The medical board complaint issued last week accuses him of operating an

unlicensed detox program, improperly using buprenorphine for addiction treatment, and overprescribing habit-forming drugs to eight patients from 1999 to 2002.

Harwell, the doctor's lawyer, said Kipper could not comment on the complaint without violating patients' privacy. Harwell said he hoped to reach a settlement with the board that would allow Kipper to keep his license.

Osbourne became Kipper's patient in June 2002. The singer was overwhelmed by the success of his new TV series and, by his own account, was "strung out on narcotics."

Osbourne, 55, rose to fame in the late 1960s when he formed Black Sabbath, a British rock quartet often cited as a pioneer in the heavy metal genre. He launched a solo career in 1979 and went on to sell more than 40 million albums.

Guided by wife Sharon, who is also his manager, he reinvented himself during the '90s as an elder statesman of heavy metal. His annual "Ozzfest" tours, featuring Osbourne alongside hot young bands, attract huge audiences.

In March 2002, MTV launched its unscripted series about Osbourne's home life, portraying him as the doting patriarch of a dysfunctional family. "The Osbournes" was an immediate sensation, attracting record audiences for a cable show and spawning books, DVDs, a clothing line, playing cards and other merchandising spinoffs.

In May and June of that year, Osbourne signed a \$10-million renewal deal with MTV. He met President Bush at a Washington dinner. He performed at Buckingham Palace and shook hands with Queen Elizabeth II.

It was more than Osbourne could handle, and he suffered a relapse, abusing prescription narcotics. He declined to say what narcotics he was taking or how he obtained them. Sharon, who had heard about Kipper from a friend, contacted him to arrange an intervention.

The doctor showed up at the Osbourne mansion with a team of nurses on June 27, 2002, and began his detox program. The treatment took 10 days. Kipper charged \$30,500 - nearly triple the rate at traditional rehab centers.

By early July, Osbourne was ready to start his next "Ozzfest" tour. Then he learned that Sharon had cancer. He postponed the first two concerts while she had surgery. By July 10, Osbourne was on the road, performing in Scranton, Pa. But his emotional state was fragile.

Kipper accompanied him for the first week of the tour to monitor his recovery. The doctor charged \$32,200 for his services and those of a nurse, records show. The Osbournes said they also paid for Kipper's air travel, meals and hotel accommodations.

Episodes of "The Osbournes" filmed around this time show the star staring sadly out the window of his tour bus, crying on stage and leaving distraught phone messages for his wife from hotel rooms around the country.

"Ozzy couldn't cope," Sharon said. "He was worried I might die. He fell apart."

According to the Osbournes, Kipper said he could help.

More and More Drugs

The doctor diagnosed Osbourne as suffering from anxiety and depression and began treating him for those conditions and for a tremor that had become more pronounced during the family crisis.

In August 2002, Kipper put Osbourne on Abien, a sedative often used for insomnia, and Adderall, an amphetamine mixture. Kipper also provided nurses to watch over Osbourne at home.

The drug regimen quickly expanded to include anti-anxiety pills, antipsychotic tablets and antidepressants, as well as stimulants and tranquilizers.

In September, Kipper added Mysoline, a barbiturate typically used to prevent seizures. Its side effects include dizziness and lack of muscle coordination.

Soon Osbourne was also swallowing Zyprexa, an antipsychotic drug developed to control schizophrenia and other severe mental disorders.

By November 2002, the rock star was taking 13 different medications, including

Valium, an anti-anxiety drug whose side effects can include clumsiness, grogginess and loss of balance.

Medical literature on Valium cautions that it is habit-forming and can magnify the effects of sedatives, antidepressants, anti-seizure medicines and other drugs.

In May 2003, Kipper added the amphetamine Dexedrine to Osbourne's roster of medications.

Osbourne said he did not question what Kipper was doing because he liked and trusted him.

In all, Kipper prescribed more than 13,000 doses of 32 different pharmaceuticals between August 2002 and August 2003, records show.

"The doctor was stimulating him with uppers at the same time he was knocking him down with tranquilizers and barbiturates," said Thompson, the USC drug expert.

"On top of that, he was giving him Zyprexa, a drug that should only be prescribed to extremely psychotic people. These are very powerful psychotherapeutic drugs that shouldn't just be passed out by an internist at this potency and frequency," Thompson said.

The experts consulted by The Times said it appeared that Kipper prescribed some drugs to counteract side effects caused by other medications Osbourne was taking at his direction.

For example, Zyprexa, the antipsychotic that Osbourne began taking in October 2002, causes shaking and a ponderous, stiff gait in some patients. In January, Kipper started the singer on carbidopa-levodopa, a drug used to relieve such symptoms.

Dr. Wayne Sandler, a Century City psychiatrist who reviewed Osbourne's prescription records for The Times, said it was safer to discontinue a drug that was causing troublesome side effects than to prescribe additional medications.

"You just end up chasing one symptom with another," he said. "It's much more aggressive than you need to be.. What you would normally do is say, 'Gee, you're having side effects. Why don't we back off on you taking these medications?' "

In addition to the oral medications, Kipper periodically gave Osbourne shots of buprenorphine mixed with Valium.

Buprenorphine, a chemical cousin of morphine and heroin, is often used to treat severe, chronic pain. Kipper administered the drug as part of Osbourne's detox treatment in June 2002. At that time, it was illegal to use buprenorphine for that purpose in this country.

The Food and Drug Administration has since approved its use for detoxification, under strict conditions. A physician must take a state-approved class and obtain certification from the state medical board. Kipper did not have the certification during the time he was treating Osbourne.

Records indicate that the doctor gave Osbourne five buprenorphine-Valium injections in July 2002, four the next month, six in September and six in October. This year, Kipper gave him two injections in March, seven in April and eight in May.

Kipper charged about \$500 each for the shots, which he described on invoices as "pain injections."

Osbourne described the injections as "cocktails" and said he looked forward to them.

"He brought it to the house. Sometimes I went to get it at his office over there by the Peninsula - or up at his house on the hill," Osbourne said. "I quite liked it."

Captured on MTV

Osbourne's lumbering gait, lack of coordination and garbled speech became a central theme of "The Osbournes" during the show's second season, which aired beginning in November 2002.

MTV crews followed Osbourne to Las Vegas for a performance at the Palm Hotel. In the episode, titled "Viva Ozz Vegas," Osbourne is seen mumbling incoherently to

fans as he wanders the marble halls of the Venetian hotel-casino.

Kipper, who accompanied Osbourne on a private jet, is seen hanging out with the singer as he plays slot machines at the Venetian. The Osbournes paid Kipper \$15,000 for his services on the three-day trip, records show. The couple say they also paid for his airfare, hotel room and meals.

In another episode of "The Osbournes," the star walks around in circles in the middle of his kitchen in Beverly Hills, staring blankly into space. In a dinner table scene, he smacks himself in the face while trying to swat a fly.

On camera, everybody in the room laughs. Behind the scenes, friends and family members were growing increasingly concerned.

"My pharmacist warned me that I was starting to look like death," Osbourne said.

As her husband was stumbling through episodes of the MTV series, Sharon was undergoing chemotherapy under the supervision of a cancer specialist. Kipper, meanwhile, was caring for her at home.

She said she had grown fond of Kipper when he began treating her husband. "When I was going through my chemotherapy and cancer treatment, he just kind of came in and took over," she said.

Kipper prescribed anti-anxiety drugs for her and provided nurses to watch over her at home. These were in addition to the nurses Kipper had supplied to tend to Ozzy.

Working 12-hour shifts, the pool of nurses provided coverage seven days a week. They became part of the backdrop of "The Osbournes."

A review of state records shows that none of the women was a licensed registered nurse or a licensed vocational nurse.

Yet Kipper charged the couple about \$65 an hour for their services - \$25 above the going hourly rate for registered nurses in Los Angeles.

Nursing services accounted for more than \$400,000 of the total fees the Osbournes paid Kipper, records show.

Harwell, the doctor's attorney, said Kipper could not comment on his nurses' credentials because "revealing such information would violate patient confidences."

In December 2002, Kipper tried to interest the Osbournes in upgrading their medical care. In a letter, he invited them to sign up for his new "Personal Physician Program" featuring "round-the-clock availability, cell-phone access, same-day appointments and no waiting."

The cost: \$35,000 a year for the Osbournes and their three children.

"I am offering this program to a limited number of my devoted patients," Kipper

"I have enjoyed a valued friendship and I'm honored to be your doctor," the letter said. "I look forward to providing the kind of care you deserve and need."

Enough Is Enough

The Osbournes were too distracted to respond.

On Dec. 31, 2002, during taping of the season finale of "The Osbournes," Ozzy got drunk and passed out during a party at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Although he was taking 10 different medications at the time, he can be seen drinking wine, whiskey and beer.

Kipper attended the event. At one point, Osbourne hugs him on camera and gives him a kiss on the cheek. His assistants say Osbourne was so inebriated that he had to be carried to bed that night.

By summer, Osbourne said, he was swallowing 42 pills a day. Prescription records provide a breakdown: Osbourne was taking eight doses of amphetamines per day, nine doses of tranquilizers, 16 of two different barbiturates, two anti-seizure tablets, two anticonvulsant pills, two painkillers and three sleeping pills.

In August, Osbourne was invited to sing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" during the seventh-inning stretch at Wrigley Field in Chicago. He slurred his way

through the song, mangling the familiar lyrics.

The scene was replayed repeatedly on national TV.

"Ozzy was overmedicated," Sharon Osbourne said. "He couldn't speak. He couldn't walk. He was falling over. Ozzy would call Kipper and tell him how bad he was feeling, and Kipper would say: 'Take five more of those and 10 more of these.' It was insane."

After the Wrigley Field fiasco, Sharon said, she had had enough. She said she called Kipper and told him to stay away from her husband.

Then, on the advice of a friend, she scheduled an appointment for Ozzy with Dr. Allan H. Ropper, chief of neurology at Caritas St. Elizabeth's Medical Center in Boston.

Osbourne flew to Boston in September and met with Ropper.

"He was absolutely flabbergasted about the kinds and amounts of medication that I was on," Ozzy said. "He asked me, 'Where are you getting all these pills from?' Then he just threw everything in the trash."

Osbourne said the doctor weaned him off Kipper's medications and wrote him prescriptions for three drugs, primarily to treat what the singer described as a hereditary tremor. Ropper declined to comment.

Interviewed at his mansion in October, Osbourne spoke and walked normally, showing none of the hesitation and confusion he had displayed on "The Osbournes."

"Looking back on it now, I see Dr. Kipper as sort of a friendly villain," Osbourne said. "He befriended me. I liked him. He comes off as a really nice guy - that is, until you get the bill."



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