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April 30, 2018

Karl C. Colder
Special Agent in Charge
Washington, DC Division
Drug Enforcement Administration
800 K Street, N.W.
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20001

RE: Complaint about Ronny Lynn Jackson, M.D.

Dear Mr. Colder:

Public Citizen, a consumer advocacy group with more than 400,000 members and supporters nationwide, hereby requests that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) promptly launch a formal investigation into the conduct of Dr. Ronny Lynn Jackson who, according to recent media reports^{1,2} and a related op-ed published in *The New York Times*,³ has a history of “casually dispensing Ambien [zolpidem] for sleep and Provigil [modafinil] for arousal, both of which are dangerous controlled substances with a potential for addiction.” If true, such conduct would be “illegal” according to a spokesperson for the DEA⁴ and would warrant immediate revocation of Dr. Jackson’s DEA registration.

In an interview with CNN, Senator Jon Tester — the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, which had been considering Dr. Jackson’s nomination to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs until the White House withdrew it last week⁵ — said that Dr. Jackson would

¹ Tatum S. Sen. Tester: VA nominee handed out prescriptions 'like candy.' April 25, 2018. CNN.

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/24/politics/tester-va-ronny-jackson/index.html>. Accessed April 26, 2018.

² Bernstein L. Ambien should not be handed out 'like candy,' experts say of Ronny L. Jackson’s alleged practices. April 25, 2018. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2018/04/25/ambien-should-not-be-handed-out-like-candy-experts-say-of-ronny-l-jacksons-alleged-practices/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a6937f0087c9. Accessed April 27, 2018.

³ Friedman RA. Ronny Jackson should never have headed the V.A. Should he even be practicing medicine? April 26, 2018. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/26/opinion/ronny-jackson-candy-man.html>. Accessed April 26, 2018.

⁴ Kolata G. Trump’s doctor accused of handing out Ambien. D.E.A. calls the practice illegal. April 26, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/26/health/trump-doctor-ambien.html>. Accessed April 27, 2018.

⁵ Fandos N, Baker P. White House withdraws Jackson nomination for V.A. chief amid criticism. April 26, 2018. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/26/us/politics/ronny-jackson-nomination-withdrawn.html>. Accessed April 26, 2018.

hand out prescriptions for Ambien and Provigil “like candy.”⁶ According to Senator Tester, his committee had received reports alleging that on overseas trips, Dr. Jackson would “go down the aisle way of the airplane and say, ‘All right, who wants to go to sleep?’ And hand out the prescription drugs like they were candy ... and put them to sleep and then give them the drugs to wake them back up again.”⁷

Ambien is approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for short-term treatment of insomnia characterized by difficulties with sleep initiation. Provigil is approved by the FDA to improve wakefulness in adult patients with sleepiness associated with narcolepsy, obstructive sleep apnea, or shift work disorder. Both drugs are schedule IV controlled substances that have the potential for addiction, physical dependence, and abuse.

In an op-ed published in *The New York Times* last week, Dr. Richard Friedman, the director of the psychopharmacology clinic at the Weill Cornell Medical College in New York, highlighted the most concerning aspect of the allegations regarding Dr. Jackson’s dispensation of Ambien and Provigil:⁸

First of all, with the exception of the president, it’s a safe bet that the people receiving these medications were not Dr. Jackson’s patients. That would mean he was prescribing controlled drugs to people whose medical histories he knew nothing about. What if, for example, some of them had a substance abuse or alcohol problem or serious pulmonary diseases? For people with those conditions, Ambien, a potent hypnotic drug, can be quite harmful. And Provigil, a long-acting stimulant-like drug, can raise blood pressure and provoke anxiety and worse in people who are medically or psychiatrically vulnerable.

Just as worrisome, Dr. Jackson would have had no idea whether any of the people he allegedly casually drugged were taking other medications that might interact adversely with what he was handing out. Can the president’s physician really be clueless of the fact that interactions between drugs are among the most common causes of iatrogenic (that is, accidentally doctor-induced) morbidity and mortality?

I have reviewed many physicians whose treatments fall outside the bounds of accepted medical practice for New York State’s Office of Professional Medical Conduct. I can say that the “treatments” Dr. Jackson is accused of would almost certainly qualify for such review — and probably result in sanctions, from a fine up to the loss of a medical license.

⁶ Tatum S. Sen. Tester: VA nominee handed out prescriptions 'like candy.' April 25, 2018. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/24/politics/tester-va-ronny-jackson/index.html>. Accessed April 26, 2018.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Friedman RA. Ronny Jackson should never have headed the V.A. Should he even be practicing medicine? April 26, 2018. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/26/opinion/ronny-jackson-candy-man.html>. Accessed April 26, 2018.

In closing, the allegations regarding Dr. Jackson, which he has denied,⁹ are serious and appear to be credible and, if confirmed, demonstrate that he has engaged in the illegal distribution of controlled substances and has violated the terms of his DEA registration.

We look forward to your prompt attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Carome, M.D.
Director
Public Citizen's Health Research Group

⁹ Fandos N, Baker P. White House withdraws Jackson nomination for V.A. chief amid criticism. April 26, 2018. *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/26/us/politics/ronny-jackson-nomination-withdrawn.html>. Accessed April 26, 2018.