
THE GREAT AMERICAN ADDICTION

A LOOK AT ONE OF AMERICA'S MOST DEADLY
DISEASES: OPIOID ADDICTION

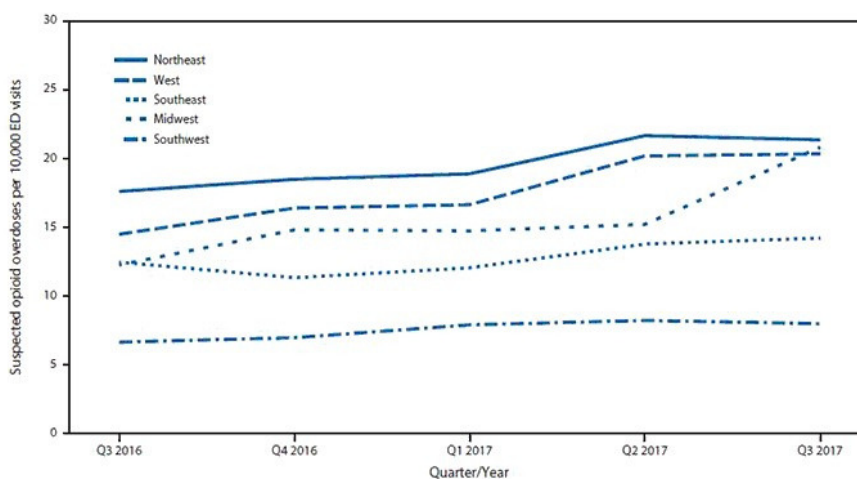
Prepared by:
CASSIDY PAYNE

INTRO

Ann Marie never imagined being faced with the task of picking out the suit and tie her son, Christopher Perrotto, would be buried in –but that was exactly what she found herself doing after Christopher lost his life to an overdose on prescription opioids. Ann Marie had tried to get Christopher help. She had admitted him into various treatment centers, but Christopher was either rejected or kicked out. Christopher’s condition worsened with time, and two years after his initial prescription to opioid drugs after a car accident, he lost his life at 22 years old.[i]

THE ISSUE

Opioid overdoses were the cause of over 42,000 deaths in 2016. 40% of those were reported to involve prescription opioids.[i] In 2017, 47,000 people lost their lives to opioid overdoses. An additional 1.7 million people that same year suffered from opioid use disorders.[iii]





<https://www.irontribune.com/2018/04/30/opioid-crisis-opioids-can-be-natural-or-man-made-substances/>

WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Opioids are defined as drugs derived from poppy and other synthetic derivatives.[i] Narcotics, another term used to refer to opioids pertains to a variety of substances that eases the senses and ultimately relieves pain.[ii] Some opioids are made from the plant directly, these are popularly known as opiates. Others are made in labs using similar chemical structures. Besides pain relief, opioids are known to bring its users relaxing sensations and ultimately a “high”, which is why they are most popularly used outside of medicinal reasons.[iii] The most commonly prescribed opioids are: hydrocodone, oxymorphone, morphine, codeine and fentanyl.[iv]

Among the most dangerous of opioid drugs is Heroin, though it is never used for medicinal purposes.[v] Prescription opioids and heroin share similar chemical make-ups and produce similar highs, but, in some places, heroin is much cheaper and accessible than prescription opioids. This is why some people prefer to seek relief from the heroin drug. An estimated 80% of heroin users misused prescription opioids before switching to the cheaper drug. However, only 5% of prescription opioid abusers switch to heroin. This is partially due to data that shows heroin as the most popular among first time opioid users – 1/3 of participants in a recent study reported that heroin was the first opioid used for a regular high.[vi]

OPIOIDS ON THE BRAIN

The human body contains opioid receptors in the brain, spinal cord and other organs related to sensations of pain and relief. Opioid drugs bind to these receptors and activates them inside of the body, blocking pain signals to the brain. This releases large amounts of dopamine throughout the body. These releases can be so great on a person's body, it encourages the person to experience the sensation again and again.[x]

The down side of these opioid releases is that it also blocks other signals to the brain which can slow down the process of breathing to dangerous levels. When this occurs, the user experiences Hypoxia, or the condition in which too little oxygen reaches the brain. Hypoxia itself brings on a list of harmful effects including coma, permanent brain damage and also death. [xi]

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

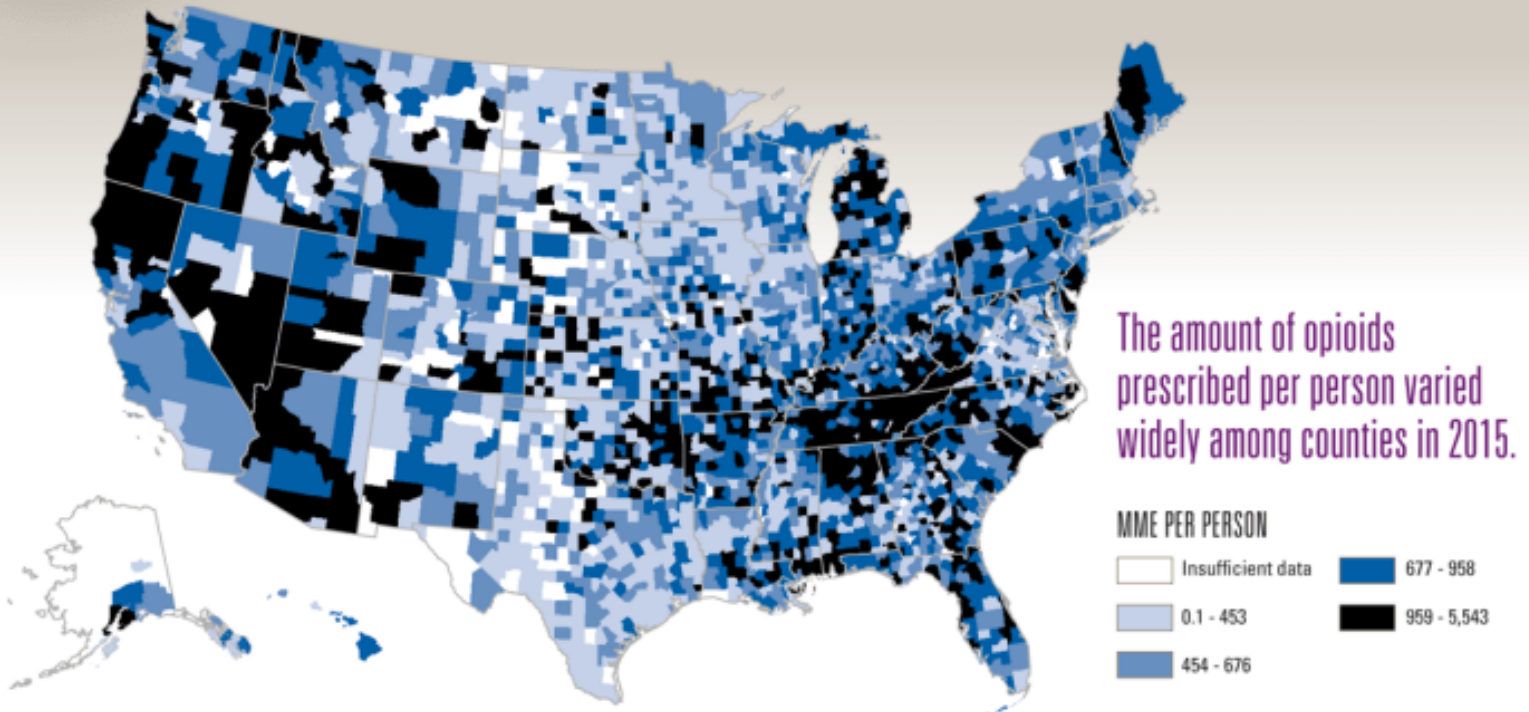
Quitting opioid abuse is easier said than done, and repeated misuse of them can lead to a substance use disorder (SUD). Addiction is the most severe stage of a SUD and may be chronic. Compulsive, uncontrollable drug seeking and use is the first characteristic associated with addiction. Harmful behaviors and long-lasting damage to the brain can both be brought on by those finding themselves with drug addictions. [xii]

Drug dependence is similar to abuse as they both occur after repeated use; however, with a dependence, the neurons in the brain have adapted to the chemicals of the drug so they can function normally only in the presence of the drug. In the absence of the drug, several physiological reactions take place. We see this with substances as mild as caffeine abuse and as critical as heroin abuse. In more severe cases of drug dependence, patients dependent on opioids require medical support in order to detox themselves off of the drug.[xiii]

Along the lines of drug dependency, drug tolerance is developed with long-term drug users build a tolerance to the drug, meaning they require higher and/or more frequent doses in order to receive their desired effects.[xiv]

“What is addiction, really? It is a sign, a signal, a symptom of distress. It is a language that tells us about a plight that must be understood.” – Alice Miller.

FEEDING THE ISSUE



<https://www.marylandmatters.org/2019/05/16/national-report-paints-bleak-picture-of-opioid-addiction-in-western-md/>

According to the 2018 National Drug Threat Assessment, America's opioid crisis has reached all time high levels and is showing no signs of slowing down. Opioid analgesics have been associated with the highest number of deaths by overdose in the United States since 2001. It had been reported that opioids, including prescription opioids, amounted for 66% of the 64,000 deadly drug overdoses in 2016. To put these numbers into perspective, this means that there were roughly 116 opioid related deaths a day.[xv]

Certain opioids, such as those acquired by Christopher Perrotto, are prescribed to patients to relieve pain. These are known as Controlled Prescription Drugs (CPDs). Perrotto was prescribed opioids after a minor car accident left him with back pain. His tolerance to the drugs, however, overpowered their strength resulting in Christopher being prescribed more opioid drugs. What was a 1-pill-a-day quickly turned into 25 a day, which left Christopher's life turned upside down. Ann Marie noticed that her son spent many nights away from home, and those that he did spend at home, found himself having difficulty with sleeping. Christopher also became defensive, lashing out at the people he loved.[xvi]

FEEDING THE ISSUE

Unfortunately, no matter how controlled these substances are, there is still a deadly dark side to them. Death by Controlled Prescription Drugs (CPDs) is the second most common out of any substance abuse death in the United States. From 2009 to 2017, opioids have accounted for four out of the seven Controlled Prescription Drugs distributed across the U.S. Hydrocodone and oxycodone opioid prescription drugs were the most widely sold in hospitals, pharmacies, treatment programs, etc.[iii] This means that, out of all prescription drugs, opioids are the most prevalently prescribed in medical practices; therefore, these drugs are making their way into more outpatient hands than any other drug. Which also means, these deadly drugs are more accessible than the majority of drugs on the market. [xviii]

Data from the Automation of Reports and Consolidated Orders System (ARCOS) showed that the number of opioid CPDs legally distributed, by hospitals, pharmacies, ect., was highest in 2011 when 17.2 billion dosage units were manufactured and delivered. Luckily, in 2017, only 12.6 billion dosage units were manufactured and delivered. The number of manufactured and delivered opioid CPDs have managed to stay under the 12.6 billion level since 2017.[xix]

The successful reach of opioid CPDs have made opioid traffickers rethink their strategies –they’ve began using the guise of CPDs to expand their market. However, it has been reported that the most misused pain relievers are obtained from friends and relatives.[xx]

OTHER THREATS



63%

In 2015, 63% of cocaine-related overdose deaths involved an opioid, especially heroin.



42%

By the first half of 2015, fentanyl-related deaths in Florida that involved cocaine increased to 42% (up from 17%).



100%

Colombian cartels increased cocaine production by 100% between 2013 and 2015.

<https://www.addictioncenter.com/drugs/heroin/speedball/>

OTHER THREATS

Synthetic opioids, largely fentanyl, are primarily sourced from China and Mexico. These drugs have become the most lethal of opioid abused in America. Opioid traffickers will sell fentanyl as counterfeit prescription pills. Experimentation with fentanyl, such as selling fentanyl to users with other CPDs and substances, is also becoming more and more popular with drug traffickers –this is largely to avoid many new regulations the U.S., China and Mexico have placed on drug manufacturing and distributing.[xxi]

The opioid epidemic has also made its way into other drug trades. Cocaine, for example, has also been an abused drug on the rise. The presence of fentanyl in cocaine supplies has also been on the rise. The Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Administration suspects that the popularity of opioid drugs have made them a top contender for the cocaine trade; therefore, traffickers are growing their markets and profits by combining the two –making drug twice as deadly and twice as addictive. [xxii]

"When there are no opioids involved in cocaine-overdose deaths you see an overall decline in recent years. But when you look at cocaine and opioids together, we see a more than doubling in the number of overdoses since 2010, with heroin and synthetic opioids increasingly involved in these deaths."

- Christopher M. Jones, Department of Health and Human Services acting associate deputy assistant secretary, U.S. News & World Report, 2017

CHANCES FOR HELP

For a lot of opioid addicts, treatments can range from medicines to behavioral therapies. Buprenorphine and methadone are the two medicines predominantly used to help with opioid addictions. They work by attaching to the same opioid receptors in the brain and reducing the cravings and other withdrawal symptoms. Behavioral therapies encourage people to alter their attitudes towards their drug uses to better their life skills. These therapies also encourage those seeking help to continue treatments and medications.[xxiii]

Cognitive behavioral therapy is a form of therapy that aims to change the patient's behaviors, and manage triggers and stress points. Another form of therapy is multidimensional family therapy, mostly developed for adolescents, those therapy focuses on the personal and family influences on drug use patters. [xxiv] Many communities have established support groups and organizations to help those seeking help from drug addictions. One of which is Christopher's Reason, a charitable organization started by Christopher Perrotto's mother, Ann Marie. The organization holds support groups for individuals, families and loved ones affected by drug abuse. Christopher's Reason also collects donations for those suffering from addiction to provide assistance to addicts and their families in need.[xxv]

OPIOID ADDICTION RESOURCES

Together we can stop this
deadly epidemic.

**ADDICTION IS A CHRONIC DISEASE, LIKE
DIABETES OR HEART DISEASE, MEANING
THERE IS NO CURE. BUT ADDICTION CAN
BE MANAGED, AND PEOPLE WITH
ADDICTION CAN, AND DO, RECOVER.**

SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Dual Recovery Anonymous – 913.991.2703

LifeRing – 800.811.4142

National Alliance of Methadone Advocates – 212.595.NAMA (6262)

Rational Recovery – 530.621.4374

Secular Organizations for Sobriety – 323.666.4295

SMART Recovery – 866.951.5357

Women for Sobriety, Inc. – 215.536.8026

<https://www.asam.org/resources/patient-resources>