



Opioids and the Courts News: Feb. 21, 2018

Judges' Journal (Winter 2018)

[Why Addiction Should Be Considered a Disease](#)

The over-prescription of drugs has killed more people than the Iraq and Vietnam wars combined. The opioid epidemic is a public health crisis that needs to be addressed now. To fully understand the epidemic, people must first accept addiction as a disease and not a moral flaw, but this can complicate how to punish people for addiction-related crimes.

[Prevalence, Causes, and Treatment of Substance Use Disorders: A Primer](#)

Drug and alcohol addiction are among the most prevalent and costly psychiatric disorders, particularly in the context of the criminal justice system. The authors provide an overview of the science of addiction, focusing on the diagnosis of substance use disorder, the brain processes that lead to addiction, the risk factors that increase the risk for addiction, and the available behavioral and medical treatments.

[What Happens in the Brain When a Person Becomes Addicted?](#)

The science of addiction has led to promising changes in how substance use disorder is treated. Substance abuse is now addressed as a regular part of routine health care, and there has been a shift toward more treatment-related ways to handle addiction in the criminal justice system.

[Opioid Use Disorder: A Look Backward and a Path Forward](#)

The use of opioids to relieve pain dates back thousands of years; however, the current state of opioid addiction and the number of opioid overdose deaths per year in America are dire. Part of the tragedy behind the opioid epidemic is that opioid addiction has been proven to be highly treatable.

[Best Practices and Recommendations: Judicial and Medical Perspectives on Cases Involving Addiction to Opioids](#)

How to handle cases involving drug use has evolved over time as our understanding of addiction and science has become more sophisticated. We have learned that punishing addicts is not black and white, and steps like enhancing sentencing to deter drug traffickers are now being taken to get at the root of the problem.



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[When Less Is More: Reforming the Criminal Justice Response to the Opioid Epidemic](#)

Decriminalizing addiction is a step toward meaningful reform and saving prisoners' lives. By seeking alternative strategies to incarceration for addicts, we can promote public health, preserve public safety, and treat addiction more safely than the forced detoxification that comes with jailing.

Indiana

[Judges find solution to caseload burden](#)

Kokomo Perspective

The issue of case allocation first came to the forefront during January's meeting of the Howard County Council. There, [Judge Bill] Menges detailed the increased caseload his court, which handles all drug-related cases, had incurred as a result of the opioid crisis. At that time, Menges sought an additional employee and raises for his present staff to deal with the increase. That idea, which flew in the face of Howard County's attrition policy, has been bypassed with the new plan, though.

North Carolina

[Amid opioid epidemic, Buncombe County drug court graduates find path to new life](#)

Asheville Citizen-Time

Thornburg was a judge during the crack epidemic and now he leads drug court in the time of the opioid epidemic. To him, they are all serious drug crises.

But the difference between crack and opioids is that many heroin users are not getting second chances because they die of overdoses, and that worries him, he said.

Williams agreed and said that opiate users have such a difficult time maintaining sobriety that it has forced everyone working in the addiction space to drastically change their approach.

Thornburg sees his role as a judge of drug court to be two-fold - first upholding the law and second treating each case individually and with special attention.

Opioids have really shaped the way they treat people who come under their care, Thornburg said, because there are so many other aspects to their addiction.



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Minnesota

[Dayton unveils opioid action plan](#)

KARE

The State of Minnesota already has worked to improve collaboration between public safety officials and public health professionals to encourage people to seek treatment and reduce the flow of illicit opioids. The Action Plan recommends that current collaboration efforts be expanded, justice system-based opioid abuse treatment programs be strengthened, and a predictable, equitable funding source for drug courts be identified.

Pennsylvania

[Wolf Proposes \\$\\$ for Drug Courts to Fight Opioids](#)

Philadelphia Public Record

As part of his 2018-19 proposed budget, Gov. Tom Wolf is recommending \$2 million for new drug courts and the expansion and enhancement of existing courts through an appropriation to the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime & Delinquency.

“Drug courts are a key component in the fight against the opioid epidemic,” PCCD Chairman Charles Ramsey said. “These courts address the underlying addiction and mental health issues of people involved in the criminal justice system while holding them accountable for their actions.”

West Virginia

[Drug Courts in West Virginia - a Solution for the Opioid Crisis?](#)

West Virginia Public Broadcasting

Thomas is judge in a busy adult and juvenile drug court in Boone County, two of 48 drug courts in West Virginia, according to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals.

“Our drug court, if you do everything perfect, lasts 12-months,” Thomas said. “And they go through different phases where they are required to do counseling, where they are required to submit to a lot of urine drug screens, where they are required to complete community service, we work on their education.”

West Virginia

[Drug Court Judge Shares Thoughts on Opioid Epidemic Solutions](#)

West Virginia Public Broadcasting

On this West Virginia Morning, The Legislature Today Executive Producer Suzanne Higgins speaks with the director of the Oscar-nominated film Heroin(e) and two women



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featured in it. We bring you an excerpt with one of those women: Patricia Keller, family court and former longtime drug court judge, who discusses the work she's doing in Huntington to fight the opioid epidemic.