



Opioids and the Courts News: July 26, 2019

National

[Opioid deaths are down. But challenges continue.](#)

Washington Post

As the 20th century came to a close, the United States faced many challenges, but a high rate of death from prescription opioid overdoses was not one of them. In 1999, 3,442 people died from taking excessive pain-killing substances such as oxycodone or hydromorphone. Each such death, of course, was a tragedy; but the country as a whole could not speak of a crisis. Only eight years later, the number of prescription opioid-related deaths had nearly quadrupled, reaching 12,796 in 2007 — and the United States was in the grip of an addiction crisis. It would ultimately morph into new epidemics of heroin and fentanyl use, leaving hundreds of thousands of people dead and families shattered all over America.

National

[Flooded with opioids, Appalachia is still trying to recover](#)

Washington Post

[Amber Wood] was diverted to drug court, a program in which she got drug-tested and saw a judge on a regular schedule to avoid being put behind bars. She's training as a peer recovery specialist. At the diner, she's been freshly promoted from dishwasher to cook. Though apprehensive about sharing her story in public, she wants to spread a positive message to other people in her situation: "There's hope. There's another side of addiction. You can get clean and have a productive life."

National

[As the nation's opioid crisis grew, the pills got stronger](#)

Associated Press

An Associated Press analysis of drug distribution data released as a result of lawsuits against the industry also found that the amount of opioids as measured by total potency continued to rise early this decade even as the number of pills distributed began to dip.

The reason: Doctors were prescribing — and the industry was supplying — stronger pills.

"It shows it wasn't just the number of pills being shipped that increased. The actual amount of opioids being prescribed and consumed went up," said Anna Lembke, a Stanford University professor who researches opioids and is serving as a paid expert witness for plaintiffs in the litigation.

"We know that the higher the dose of prescribed opioids, and the longer patients are on them, even for a legitimate pain condition, the more likely they are to get addicted."