

## Opiate Problem – Ashland County

There was an Ashland County Heroin Summit last November. The summit was held to inform Ashland County citizens about the serious opiate problem in our county. We also wanted to get input from those attending. A significant number of those attending the Summit recommended community education as part of what should be done to deal with this problem. In collaboration with the Mental Health and Recovery Board, A.C.C.A.D.A. will be doing a public education effort to inform the public about this growing problem.

There will be more articles, billboards, newspaper ads, radio public service announcements and other efforts to inform the public.

A.C.C.A.D.A. is the outpatient treatment and prevention provider for Ashland County. We are a contract agency of the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County (MHRB). A.C.C.A.D.A. is also a partner agency of the United Way.

One way to demonstrate how the problem of opiate (opioids) addiction has grown is to examine the number of new A.C.C.A.D.A. intakes annually. In 1997 we admitted no individuals with an opiate diagnosis. By 2005 we had admitted 21. In 2010 there were 50 admitted. In 2014 there were 83 persons admitted for an opiate diagnosis. This does not count those who carried over from prior years and were still receiving services. A.C.C.A.D.A. opioid admissions:

1997 – 0, 2000 – 1, 2002 – 3, 2005 – 21, 2008 – 36, 2010 – 50, 2011 – 92, 2012 – 73, 2013 – 74. 2014 – 83

And remember, these are just the new admissions for treatment. Of course some do seek treatment more than once. We would have to assume that there are a good number in the community who have not yet sought out treatment services. Many seek treatment voluntarily while others are court ordered.

At one point, it was determined that 55% of A.C.C.A.D.A. outpatient treatment resources were focused on those individuals with opiate drug abuse disorders. A recent analysis showed that 59% of those using opiates were heroin addicted.

For the Heroin Summit, our County prosecutor reviewed the cases where he filed felony charges and 45% were related to opiate addiction. Opiates include both opiate-based painkillers and heroin.

Ashland County Probation estimates that approximately 1/3 of those on active probation are opiate related cases. It was also noted that there is a high rate of probation violations among this group.

John Good, Municipal Court Judge, recently stated “I’ve heard the heroin problem in Ashland County referred to as an epidemic, it’s more like a tidal wave.” He also has noted that the number of heroin related cases has increased dramatically in the last 3 years.

Sheriff Risner indicates that he has seen a countywide increase in burglaries and theft related to opiate addiction. Many times family are victims. This also contributes to jail crowding and a steady number of inmates experience opiate withdrawal at the County Jail.

There has been a steep increase in the prescribing of opiate-based painkillers in the last 20 years. According to the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services the distribution of opiate/based painkillers increased 6 fold from 1997 to 2007. That is a 500% increase!

The high numbers of doses of opioid painkillers, dispensed by pharmacies in Ashland County, has continued over the last 5 years:

2010 – 2,350,942

2011 -- 2,420,533

2012 – 2,423,062

2013 – 2,486,537

2014 – 2,419,374

Source: Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System

This amounts to 45.6 doses on a per capita basis in 2014. In 2014, that amounted to 45.6 pills for every man, woman and child in Ashland County. This puts a very large amount of medication into the community. The average number of doses per patient was 131. It is estimated that 80% of the opiate-based medication misused comes from someone with a legal prescription but diverted to someone else. Many who are prescribed medication do not use all of the medication prescribed and the medication may end up being sold, given away, or stolen from a medicine cabinet.

According to the Ashland County Coroner's Office there were 6 drug overdose deaths (unintended or undetermined) in 2014 and 5 of the 6 involved opioids (heroin or painkillers). Unintentional drug overdoses have become the leading cause of injury death in Ohio.

Unintentional drug overdoses caused 2,110 deaths of Ohio residents in 2013. According to a 2015 press release from the Ohio Department of Health, there were about 196 more deaths in 2013 as compared to 2012. They also stated that heroin-related deaths increased in 2013, significantly surpassing prescription opiates among unintentional overdose deaths.

Cassandra Holtzmann, Director of Job and Family Services has advised that nearly all of Children Services cases involve alcohol / drug abuse issues as either a factor or the root cause of the county child abuse and neglect cases. Children Services is doing a review to determine how many are opiate related.

The information in this article clearly indicates that this problem has grown dramatically but it does not describe in human terms the pain and suffering of those who become addicted. The distress and heartache felt by family members is also extreme. There are also serious impacts on the whole

community. Another article will explore the human tragedy of the opiate epidemic with individuals sharing some of their stories.