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## Combatting Opiate Addiction

By Monte E. Frank

Seventy-eight Americans die each day from unintentional opioid overdose, including heroin.<sup>1</sup> In Connecticut, 888 overdose deaths are projected this year alone; 60 percent of them are from opioids. Of this year's death toll, 238 are projected to be from heroin laced with fentanyl.<sup>2</sup> These numbers are staggering and impact everyone regardless of race or whether you live in downtown Bridgeport or in rural Newtown.

In recent years in Connecticut, our lawmakers working with the public health community passed significant legislation, which will save lives. However, the number of overdoses continues to rise. In Connecticut and across the country, families struggle to help their loved ones overcome addiction. Many are left financially depleted or bankrupt with no remedy in sight. Others feel helpless. Much more needs to be done, and the Connecticut Bar Association is stepping up to play our part.

On October 13-15, the CBA hosted the New England Bar Association Annual meeting in New Haven. I moderated a panel on combatting opiate addiction. The panel consisted of Dr. Daniel Tobin of the Yale School of Medicine, State Representative Sean Scanlon, and Robert Harnais, immediate past president of the Massachusetts Bar Association. Dr. Tobin educated us on the science behind addiction and the public health approach to reducing addiction and preventing overdose deaths. Representative Scanlon described the current

state of the law in Connecticut, including the significant legislation passed by the General Assembly in the last two years in large measure due to his efforts. Attorney Harnais informed us of a law in Massachusetts allowing family members, among others, to apply to the court for an involuntary commitment and the Massachusetts Bar's program to assist families going through this process.

What I took away from the panel discussion is that collaboration is needed between the legal community, the public health system, law enforcement, the judiciary, and the legislature. So far, the bar associations have not done our part. I also learned from my panel experts that efforts should generally focus on:

- Educating patients and prescribers
- Limiting the supply of opioids
- Preventing misuse, abuse, and diversion
- Preventing and treating opioid overdoses
- Treating addiction with medication-assisted therapy
- Avoiding overprescribing (there is a 7-day prescribing law in Connecticut due to recent legislation)
- Promoting safe opioid disposal through the safe discard of left-over and expired opioids<sup>3</sup> and encouragement or requirement of a pill "take-back" effort

In addition, Connecticut should explore

whether to adopt a law similar to the law in Massachusetts so that currently help-less families can obtain some emergency relief from the courts to prevent overdose and allow time for a loved one to achieve a “moment of clarity,” which might lead to recovery.

I will be appointing a CBA Task Force to Combat Opiate Addiction to engage with the public health community and the Judicial Branch and report back to me with recommendations as to what the CBA’s role in combatting the opioid epidemic should be and propose concrete steps the CBA can take. The charge to the task force will include exploring potential legislation that the CBA could sponsor.

The CBA has a long history of working towards solutions for those in our state who are in dire straits. The work of the Human Sex-Trafficking Task Force is just one example. I fully expect that the CBA Task Force to Combat Opiate Addiction will be as successful and, in doing so, lawyers will once again demonstrate their ability to promote the public good, help those in need, and ultimately save lives.

Finally, it is also not lost on me that lawyers are not immune from addiction. At least one recent tragedy in Connecticut makes that clear. Please look out for colleagues who may be in crisis and contact Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (LCL) if you have an inkling that a lawyer may need help. LCL is a free and confidential resource to help attorneys in need.

Below are some resources to learn more about LCL:

- Confidential LCL hotline: 1(800) 497-1422
- LCL website: [lclct.org](http://lclct.org)
- BarChat Video about LCL: [ctbar.org/BarChat](http://ctbar.org/BarChat) **CL**

## Notes

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), January, 2016.
2. Connecticut Medical Examiner’s Office and Connecticut Department of Public Health.
3. Adulterate and dispose (CT DEEP); Flush down the toilet (FDA)



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