



# Beyond Parody: Epidemic Far Precedes More Than Just Opiates

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The Burj Khalifa in Dubai, India, is the tallest human-made structure in the world. It is overwhelming to know that it is 2,716 feet tall. A half a mile is 2,640 feet to put things into perspective. With such a tall building, innovation and precise engineering created an elevator that travels at 22 mph. Drug and alcohol addiction is much larger of a problem than we like to admit, and when examined closely, we see just how substantial the immense challenge is. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, in 2018, an estimated 10.3 million people aged 12 or older misused opioids in the past year, 9.9 million people misused prescription pain relievers, and 808,000 people used heroin.

I have been in long-term recovery for some time now, but I would see grandmas, believe it or not, selling their legally prescribed narcotic pain medication when I was actively abusing drugs. Though stricter laws and internal policies and guidelines have been implemented since 2012, I hear from the people I help begin a healthier life that pain medication like Vicodin and Percocet are still sold on the *streets*.

A 7.5 mg/750 mg Vicodin pill will sell for an upward amount of \$6.00 per pill. If someone has a 100 in quantity prescription and sells the entire bottle, that is a \$600.00 payout. However, we cannot jump too quickly and blame the doctors or the person selling the pills. Drug addiction and illegally sold narcotics is a dilemma that goes well beyond selling, buying, and using drugs. Nonetheless, there are many layers to the said problem like how poverty affects drug use trends, pharmaceutical companies like Purdue engaging in predatory strategies to get Oxycontin prescribed more often, or Transcontinental Crime Organizations (TCO) flood the United States with illicit drugs like fentanyl and methamphetamines. And we cannot forget the failed War on Drugs.

Currently, alcohol, methamphetamines (Ice), and opiates (Heroin, Fentanyl) are more well known for consumption than benzodiazepines (Xanax, Valium) or other stimulants

(Adderall, Cocaine). As reported by Alton Memorial Hospital, their staff has screened over 685 patients for a potential substance use disorder with 385 referrals that met treatment criteria since Aug. 2019. That is a 24-referral per month average. And this is just one hospital in Madison County, Illinois when there are four others. Alton Memorial's Center for Behavioral and Addiction Medicine screen patients using the SBIRT (screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment) model. One screening tool used is the Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST-10) that can be self-administered or administered by a clinician.

We often hear political influencers say, "We cannot arrest our way out of the opiate epidemic." This epidemic far precedes more than just opiates. And it is hard to justify putting people that need treatment in jail or prison when many politicians use their nepotistic ways to commit far more significant crimes. The balance of justice is an entirely different topic that needs addressing as well. The message is straightforward to the politicians and lobbyists who do not have our communities' best interest in mind: we are not the peons you think we are. We, the people, are starting to realize we don't have to hate one another, and our love for humanity, health, and security is larger than the resentments we were sold.

This is not a parody. In previous articles, I have discussed compassion, taking individual action, and various other pathways to help mitigate this problem outside of the status-quo way of thinking. This problem is quite significant and will take those of us willing to work together to cripple the grip it has on our brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, mothers, or fathers. This problem is going to take additional innovative and creative ways to help alleviate. I am not sure about you, but I believe our communities are worth the effort, especially the younger generation that will be taking the *torch* very soon.