

Opioid-Related Conditions and the Courts

In the News: June 26, 2020



National

[The Difficulty of Counting the COVID-19 Pandemic's Full Death Toll](#)

Time

At the same time, the excess deaths tally would capture cases like [Sara] Wittner's, where the usual access to health care was disrupted.

[A recent analysis](#) from Well Being Trust, a national public health foundation, predicted as many as 75,000 people might die from suicide, drug overdose or alcohol abuse, triggered by unemployment caused by the pandemic.

"People lose their jobs and they lose their sense of purpose and become despondent, and you sometimes see them lose their lives," says [Benjamin Miller](#), Well Being's chief strategy officer, citing [a 2017 study](#) that found that for every percentage point increase in unemployment, opioid overdose deaths increased 3.6%.

Maryland

[Too Early to Link Covid-19 to Spike in Opioid-related Deaths, Health Officials Says](#)

Maryland Reporter

"It's too soon for the virus because the virus didn't really hit until the middle of March. At least the big effect of the virus probably didn't come until the middle of March," Dr. Joshua Sharfstein told MarylandReporter.com in a phone interview on Thursday.

Sharfstein served as secretary from 2011-14. He is now Vice Dean for Public Health Practice and Community Engagement at John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Sharfstein said second-quarter data is likely to be more reflective of the situation on the ground.

"I do think that it will be interesting to see what happens in the next quarter. I think the next quarter will reflect the impact of the virus more than the first quarter."

New York

[Have Drug Overdoses Spiked During the Coronavirus Crisis? It Depends Who You Ask](#)

Gotham Gazette

As the coronavirus ravaged New York, hospitals were flooded with patients and city services ground to a halt. Activists and elected officials worried that in the fray of the pandemic, with New Yorkers ordered to mostly stay inside and millions losing work, the already prevalent opioid epidemic in the state could be further exacerbated. But city and state health officials don't

have full grasp on the scope of the problem, and may not know for months, because of a lag in how drug overdose data is tracked and classified.

The NYPD, on the other hand, reports that while overdoses have fallen overall in the first half of 2020, overdose deaths appear to have significantly increased during that period, according to preliminary reports.

Reports from across the country indicate that overdose deaths have likely increased as a result of COVID-19. In [a brief report](#), updated June 18, the American Medical Association's Advocacy Resource Center noted, "More than 30 states have reported increases in opioid-related mortality as well as ongoing concerns for those with a mental illness or substance use disorder in counties and other areas within the state." Among the examples the report cited were reports from New York.

Texas

[With overdoses rising, local opioid task force fights for funding](#)

News 4

A nationwide mapping program shows opioid overdoses are on the rise during the pandemic.

Fatal overdoses are up 11.4% and nonfatal overdoses are up 18.6% across the country, according to new numbers provided by the Bexar County Joint Opioid Task Force.

The Trouble Shooters learned even with overdoses rising, state funding is being diverted away from substance use treatment.

To fill the gap, advocates are now asking Bexar County for some of those federal CARES Act dollars coming to our area. They say without that funding, the pandemic might have erased three years of hard work fighting opioids in just three months.

Vermont

[Overdoses rise at 'alarming' rate in Burlington and Vermont amid pandemic](#)

Vermont Digger

[Jackie Corbally, Burlington's high-risk behavior manager] said the uptick in overdoses may be due to more instances of fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid, being found in more substances aside from heroin, including cocaine and meth. The pressures associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, and measures to contain the virus, are also a potential factor.

"For somebody in the throes of an addiction or has the predisposition to find themselves in an addiction, Covid-19 brought all those things we don't like to see," Corbally said. "Isolation, fear, anxiety on top of which we have seen systems basically shut down for very good reason."

Wisconsin

[Ho-Chunk woman declares independence from drugs, goes on to save lives across state](#)

Post-Crescent

[Tena Quackenbush, founder of #StoptheStigma] said [Amanda Peters] was supposed to get released to her so Quackenbush could get her into a respite house for Ho-Chunk women transitioning to treatment. The courts denied that release because Peters was taking part in a drug court with its own treatment program.

“I believe without a doubt that Amanda would have loved (the Ho-Chunk respite house) and she would have thrived,” Quackenbush said. “She wanted recovery so bad.”

But the court-ordered program was unavailable, too.

“COVID-19 shut everything down and she couldn’t go because they weren’t accepting any new clients,” Quackenbush said. “Because of this, she was released and struggling out here to stay clean. ... Had she gone to treatment, she probably would be alive today.”

Peters died on May 28. She was 37.