**The Legalization Cure for the Heroin Epidemic**

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A heroin epidemic has been spreading across the United States, expanding enormously for the last several years. With it, the number of people dying has also increased dramatically. While politicians offer failed solutions like “securing the borders,” the real solution is to legalize drugs.

The number of drug overdoses in the US is approaching 50,000 per year. Of that number nearly 20,000 are attributed to legal pain killers, such as Oxycontin. More than 10,000 die of heroin overdoses. I believe these figures vastly underestimate the number of deaths that are related to prescription drug use.

The “face” of the heroin epidemic has changed since the 1960s when it was largely contained to urban “junkies” and Vietnam veterans. In recent years the epidemic spread to suburbia as heroin became a low-cost substitute for other drugs. In more recent times, the epidemic has spread to rural areas such as fishing villages in Maine and coal mining towns in Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

The problem of the epidemic rests with two causes. The first is the War on Drugs which creates profit incentives in the black market for the distribution of the most dangerous drugs. The second is the pharmaceutical-medical-FDA complex, or Big Pharma, which profits from treating pain with dangerous pharmaceutical drugs.

#### The Problem with Illegal Opiates

The War on Drugs makes the business of black market drugs more risky and expensive. Hundreds of thousands are arrested every year for illegal drug violations. If drug smugglers can make their shipments of, for example, 1,000 doses or units smaller, they are better able to avoid detection, capture, and punishment. The best and most obvious way to achieve this is to smuggle more potent versions of the drug, or more potent drugs.

Marijuana growers sought to meet the demand of smugglers by offering better processed, better grown, and eventually genetically engineered products tightly packed into “bricks.” As a result, the potency of THC in marijuana increased from less than 0.5 percent when the War on Drugs began in the early 1970s, to almost 10 percent today.

Of course, the incentive from the War on Drugs does not stop there. It also encourages producers to switch to other drugs that are more compact and potent. Therefore, marijuana as a class of drug is disadvantaged compared to more potent and more dangerous drugs like cocaine and heroin. This leaves a black market where one dose of marijuana is relatively more expensive than one dose of heroin.

In the black market consumers do not know how potent their purchases will be until after the product has been consumed. In the free market, the potency of a Bayer aspirin is always the same. In the black market, the potency of products can vary widely over time. Also, a consumer’s tolerance for a drug changes over time. Daily users may have to increase their dose over time, while new users or relapsed addicts may only need small doses. If any individual takes much more than the appropriate dose for them, then they will stop breathing and can die.

Phillip Seymour Hoffman’s overdose death helps illustrate the pitfalls created by the War on Drugs. Hoffman was a drug addict that had been off of drugs for many years. When he became overwhelmed with personal problems he relapsed and died from a combination of prescription and potent illegal drugs. There have also been numerous reports about heroin being sold that contains both heroin and a legal opiate, Fentanyl, which is often lethal.

In a free market, heroin would come in an unadulterated pharmaceutical grade form of various indentified doses. It would have warning labels and instructions. You might have to consult a medical doctor or pharmacist before purchasing heroin, or you might have to go to a clinic. The producers, distributors, and retailers would have some liability for negligence. Before it was made illegal in 1914 one of the most popular heroin products was Bayer’s Heroin.

#### The Problem with Legal Opiates

One of the biggest problems with [legal opiates](http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2016/03/16/opioid-addiction.aspx) and heroin is that the medical-pharmaceutical-FDA complex has achieved a much greater use rate in recent years. Essentially, the pharmaceutical companies bribe medical researchers, doctors, and heath bureaucrats to recommend to authorities such as the FDA to promote the use of drugs such as Oxycontin and Vicodin, instead of less powerful and less addictive alternatives that were used in the past. Of course, the taxpayer ends up paying for most of the bill.

A couple of years ago while traveling I went to a “Doc in the Box” for a minor medical issue. I was examined by a physician’s assistant and was asked what pharmacy I used. I picked up the prescription after leaving and took one pill when I arrived at the motel. I sat in a chair and later became groggy and almost lost my balance when I stood up. As soon as I steadied myself, I went to check the prescription. To my amazement, it was Oxycontin!

The problem gets worse from there because physicians are also under pressure from the government to not overprescribe strong painkillers. They, for example, cannot continue to prescribe pain killers after a wound has obviously healed. The result is that people are addicted and then cut off from these powerful opiate prescriptions.

Their alternatives include entering an addiction treatment program which can be expensive, time consuming, and ineffective. As a result, these freshly minted addicts can turn to the black market for Oxycontin and Vicodin. The problem here is that it can cost $10–25 per pill and addicts require multiple pills per day. Also the supply of such pills can be erratic.

Their next alternative is the black market heroin which seems to be more available than ever and often at a lower price per dose. If you buy in large quantities you can obtain a dose for as little as $4.00 and possibly lower.

#### Legal Use Leads to Illegal Use

This explains why we have seen the heroin epidemic spread across the country. Doctors are prescribing legal opiates to people like fishermen and coal miners who sustain painful injuries on a regular basis. They become addicted and then get cut off. Eventually they cannot afford the black market prescription drugs, so they turn to the often deadly alternative, heroin.

How can the drug legalization help solve this vexing problem? First of all, in a free market you would not have Big Pharma rigging the medical practices of doctors around the country creating thousands of addicts each month. Second, drug addiction treatment programs could use the maintenance and withdrawal method which was used somewhat effectively prior to the passage of the Harrison Narcotics Act in 1914.

Third, in a free market, drugs like heroin would be produced and sold on a commercial basis. It would be a standardized product(s) and companies that sold dangerous and addictive products would do so under several legal constraints, such as liability and negligence law. Fourth, cannabis would be legal and produced for several medical purposes, like it was prior to the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937. Many of the pre-prohibition products were used to treat pain, as well as many of the symptoms associated with opiate withdrawal, such as muscle aches, anxiety, inability to sleep, nausea, and vomiting.