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# Congressman Jason Smith's Capitol Report - An Addiction that Kills

MAY 21ST 2018 BY DEE LOFLIN

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## **Congressman Smith Capitol Report**

### **An Addiction that Kills**

**May 18, 2018**

Over the counter, under the table, stolen from a family member, begged for from a friend, purchased in a back alley, hidden in a classmates locker, received from a coworker, leftover from an injury, a forged prescription, obtained from a complete stranger. Homeless, well-educated, rich, poor, athletic, bookworm, dropout, cheerleader, unemployed, successful, mother, father, son, daughter. Synthetic opioid pain relievers like fentanyl, oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine and so many others can find their way to anyone through any way possible. They don't discriminate based on the user's background and they certainly don't care how you get them, but the national opioid epidemic is here, it's real, and it's deadly.

With over 30,000 opioid related deaths last year, those dying from opioid overdoses has tripled since the turn of the century. The amount of opioid deaths each year more than doubles those related to illicit drugs like heroin, or legal substances like alcohol. To look at it another way, opioid deaths last year accounted for more than double the number of murders in the entire United States for the year. Unless we start taking more steps to address it, these numbers will continue to climb until each one of us has lost a friend, a neighbor, or a loved one to this catastrophic epidemic.

In 2016, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act was signed into law which encompassed a number of efforts to combat opioid abuse pervasive across the country. From programs to help infants born to opioid addicted mothers to more oversight of doctors prescribing painkillers, it was an important first step to addressing some of the most glaring things which could be done to mitigate the explosion of opioid usage in America. But clearly more must be done.

Specifically, we must get to the root of the problem – where are most Americans first exposed to opioids? How do they become addicted? Approximately 51 million Americans undergo inpatient surgery each year, and over 80% of the patients who step foot into some type of surgery room receive a pain relief opioid. Roughly 75% of those patients usually have leftover unused opioids after a surgery – creating the opportunity for addiction, resale and abuse. In other words, the surgical setting is contributing to the opioid crisis by potentially exposing millions of patients annually to the risk of addiction. Patients receiving opioids after surgeries have a 44% increased risk of long term opioid use, and over 60% of people who walk out of the hospital with 3 month prescriptions for opioids will remain on those same opioids years later.

To address and reduce opioid use in surgical settings, most recently, I authored, introduced and advanced in Congress the Perioperative Reduction of Opioids (PRO) Act. This legislation will help bring about changes to limit patient exposure to opioids during pre and post-surgery center visits, better inform patients on pain management, help prevent opioid misuse and abuse after patient discharge and set up systems for safe storage and disposal of opioids. To fix any problem, you have to get to the source of the occurrence; to fix any leak, you have to identify where the problem spot is located – combatting opioid abuse is no different. We know patients are being prescribed opioids at a higher rate than ever before and opioids are more readily available than ever before. If we can cut down on the way patients are legally obtaining opioids, we can help prevent the illegal usage and illegal acts they take later on to fuel that addiction.

We have all read the sad stories about the mother of three young children, the valedictorian destined for big things, or the high school soccer star whose life was ended at the hands of an opioid addiction. But more than thinking about what could have been for these individuals, we must take action to turn the tide against an addiction which is consuming more and more of our country each day. It is my hope the PRO Act can be one small part of that solution by addressing the legal ways in which folks get their hands on opioids and ultimately become dependent on them. My heart hurts with each story I hear about another southern Missouri life lost as a result of the deadly grip of opioid addiction.

I pray for their life, for their friends, and for their family, but my prayers also include finding a solution to this crisis which so many of our towns and communities are now facing.

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