

# Kentucky Prescription Drug Abuse Summit



“Today’s turnout demonstrates an understanding that prescription drug abuse is not just a law enforcement problem but a widespread issue impacting all facets of our communities. In Kentucky we have been at ground zero for this explosion, but I think people in the Commonwealth have had enough and this event illustrates the commitment from everyone engaged in this fight to collaborate so we can present a strong and united front against this epidemic.”

~Kerry B. Harvey, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky~

“Today, we brought together stakeholders to share their specialized knowledge and to collaborate on a broad spectrum of solutions. And after today, we must continue to improve public awareness of this terrible problem through education and outreach.”

~David J. Hale, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Kentucky~

(Featured in Photo – from left to right: U.S. Attorneys Kerry B. Harvey, David J. Hale and U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida Wifredo Ferrer).





# Kentucky Prescription Drug Abuse Summit 2012

## Summary

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# PILL SUMMIT 2012 - OVERVIEW

Kentucky's U.S. Attorneys Kerry B. Harvey and David J. Hale, in partnership with the University of Kentucky (UK), hosted Kentucky's first-ever Prescription Drug Abuse Summit on Wednesday, February 1. The one-day event was attended by more than 300 health care providers, educators, law enforcement officers, public officials and high school students. The Summit focused on increasing collaboration and communication across a wide array of disciplines to combat prescription drug abuse, one of the Commonwealth's most urgent, destructive and widespread challenges. During the day-long conference, the audience heard from approximately 30 speakers including the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, Wifredo Ferrer, who spoke about the broad effort to investigate and prosecute those associated with rogue pain clinics, also known as "pill mills" in South Florida.

Faculty from UK's Colleges of Medicine, Pharmacy and Dentistry spoke along with Kentucky's Governor and Attorney General. The event incorporated panel discussions led by experts in law enforcement, health care, mental health and education who shared insights concerning the causes, effects and consequences of prescription narcotic abuse. The three U.S. Attorneys met privately with the approximately 50 high school students from across the state who attended the Summit. These students participate in their schools' mass media programs and covered the Summit for their respective school newspapers, yearbooks and television outlets. In addition to warning them of the dangers of prescription drug abuse, U.S. Attorneys Harvey, Hale and Ferrer fielded questions from the students.



# CONSEQUENCES OF PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE IN KY

**Increase in Other Crimes:** Speakers noted that many areas of the Commonwealth experience increased burglaries, thefts, and domestic violence incidents among other crimes because of prescription drug abuse. Brent Turner, the Commonwealth Attorney for Floyd County, estimates 90% of defendants in his county are prosecuted for crimes either directly or indirectly related to prescription drug abuse or diversion. This same rural county historically experienced two or three armed robberies a year; in the midst of the pill explosion the county has seen up to six armed robberies a month.

“We’ve got people living in our county that can’t pass a drug test and don’t know anyone – brother, sister, dad, uncle or grandparent who can – it’s pathetic.”

~Brent Turner, Floyd County Commonwealth Attorney~

“If you don’t think this is a violent crime you’re wrong.”

~Thomas Gorman, DEA~

**Newborn Babies at Risk:** More and more babies are born with drug withdrawal syndrome. In Kentucky between 7,000 and 8,000 babies are born every year addicted to drugs according to statistics revealed at the Summit.

**Severe Addiction:** Kentuckians in some counties are so desperate for pills they pull their own teeth just to obtain a prescription. In some areas, there is an underground market for clean urine made available to addicts for purchase so they can pass drug tests. Statistics show that 82 Kentuckians die each month from drug overdoses.

**Exploited Government Programs:** An FBI analyst estimates that approximately 80% of the people indicted on drug felony charges in his 17 county area were using some sort of government benefit program such as food stamps, Supplemental Security Income, etc., to subsidize the money they use to obtain pills. One law enforcement official suggested that many children are deprived of necessities because their parents’ resources are used to purchase drugs.



# LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE



## **Challenge:**

**Time & Money:** Pain clinic investigations are lengthy and expensive in an era of limited budgets. Local and state officials said they could multiply their staffs threefold to address the issue and it still wouldn't be enough to clean up the problem. Investigations involving doctors or clinic officials are expensive and labor intensive because investigators must gather evidence to prove a doctor prescribed outside of the scope of medical practice.

## **Addressing the Problem:**

**Law Enforcement at Work:** The Appalachia High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (AHIDTA) funds investigations in many of the drug afflicted areas in Kentucky. AHIDTA has 19 task forces, many dedicated to disrupting drug trafficking organizations involved in the illegal use of prescription drugs. AHIDTA task forces seized more than 22,000 prescription pills last year. Kentucky State Police dedicates many of its 100 investigators at its 16 posts throughout the state to addressing the prescription pill epidemic as well. The pill problem is a top priority for most law enforcement entities in the Commonwealth.

**Florida Pipeline:** Florida pill mills are a prime supplier for Kentucky addicts. Law enforcement officials reported that 90% of patients at some Florida pain clinics were from Kentucky. The U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, Wifredo A. Ferrer, reported that his office has developed local and state partnerships to combat the problem. Together they've investigated and prosecuted hundreds of drug traffickers, numerous doctors, pain clinic owners and operators, MRI centers and telemarketing firms. In these cases the government has seized a treasure trove of cash, houses, boats and other property purchased with pill mill profits.

“This is a problem we all share. What I ‘m here to tell you is that I am your partner and will be working with the U.S. Attorneys here in Kentucky and state and local partners to do something about this problem.”

~Wifredo Ferrer, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida~

“We can't solve this problem alone. If you look at the collective minds and occupations in this room you know that or you wouldn't be here.”

~Rodney Brewer, Kentucky State Police Commissioner~



## ***Future Solutions:***

**Information Sharing:** Rodney Brewer, Kentucky State Police Commissioner, implored law enforcement to share information. Kentucky State Police intelligence analysts create reports that are issued to law enforcement agencies across the Commonwealth, identifying trends and patterns in prescription drug abuse and diversion. Commissioner Brewer asked law enforcement officials to not only read the reports but to also submit information to the analysts to be used in future reports.

**Comprehensive Approach:** Jim Geldhof, DEA's Diversion Program Manager, suggested a comprehensive pursuit of every suspect supplier; all the way up from street level distributor to the wholesalers and manufacturers. Geldhof added that the DEA is issuing immediate suspension orders against any DEA registrant who is involved in pill diversion. These orders result in quicker revocation of controlled substance prescribing authority than is typically the case in criminal investigations.



# TREATMENT

**Speaking from Experience:** Dustin Gross is a former Marine Corps Lance Corporal. While on duty in Iraq, Corporal Gross suffered a severe injury and became so addicted to pain pills during his recovery that he nearly took his own life. Corporal Gross said that through education and treatment he found hope and has now been sober for 14 months. He is currently the president of a sober living community for veterans and is attending engineering school.

**Affordable Treatment:** Many medical professionals said that numerous patients with chronic pain admit addiction but can't afford treatment so they continue to use. Governor Steve Beshear announced at the Summit that he is proposing to fund for the first time outpatient substance abuse treatment through Medicaid. The proposed funding covers treatment for approximately 4,500 Kentucky adults and adolescents in the first year and an additional 1,300 people in the second year. The organization known as Operation Unlawful Narcotics Investigations Treatment and Education (UNITE) invested \$7 million in treatment vouchers for individuals who can't afford care. UNITE operates a treatment hotline that serves 29 counties and receives approximately 1,400 calls a month.

**Stopping Pill Mills Only Half the Battle:** Michelle Lofwal, a psychiatrist who treats drug addiction, states that even if authorities close rogue pain clinics, addicts will turn to other drugs such as heroin unless they have treatment options. She added that it's too late to wait until a patient reaches rock bottom to provide treatment.

**Education:** One medical professional says that medical, dental and pharmacy schools must offer more education in understanding chronic pain so that when students become professionals they will understand the consequences of prescribing narcotics to treat chronic pain.

**Health Insurance:** One doctor suggested that health insurers cover treatment for substance abuse as well as alternatives to prescription narcotics to address pain.

“We must have solutions to get patients treated when they're ready and want to be treated otherwise we will just be spinning our wheels and back at a summit five years from now with very discouraged participants.”

~Roger Humphrey, University of Kentucky, Chairman of the Department of Emergency ~







# MONITORING PROGRAM – KASPER



**How to Increase Usage:** Dr. Jeffery Talbert, a pharmacist with the University of Kentucky, revealed the results of a recent survey regarding the effectiveness of Kentucky’s All Schedule Prescription Electronic Reporting system (KASPER) in preventing doctor shopping. Of the 2,000 prescribers and 2,000 pharmacists polled, more than 90% found KASPER useful in preventing doctor shopping and around half of the prescribers said it altered their decision to write a prescription. Unfortunately, only one third of physicians actually have an account with KASPER. Talbert said that some states with Prescription Monitoring Programs (PMP) require all prescribers to have a PMP account and order a mandatory review of its reports at least once every six months.

**KASPER Improvements:** Kentucky Attorney General Jack Conway said that KASPER needs to become more user friendly for law enforcement in order to identify unscrupulous doctors. Attorney General Conway discussed the need for Kentucky’s monitoring program to communicate with similar systems in contiguous states to prevent state-to-state doctor shopping.

**Future Improvements:** Kevin Payne of the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services says he hopes by next year we will be able to use KASPER to share information with other states to target individuals who doctor shop in multiple states.



# MEDICAL RESPONSE

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## **Challenge:**

**Legit vs. Non Legit:** Medical professionals spoke of the difficulty in recognizing drug-seeking patients. Many expressed that while they don't want to deny needed medication to their patients, they understand the magnitude of prescription pill abuse.

**Mixing Pills:** Some pharmacists said that part of the overdose problem comes from patients mixing pills. Some said that legitimate patients legally obtain pills from a variety of physicians to treat multiple ailments such as depression and physical pain among others. While each medication isn't harmful by itself, accidental overdoses can occur as a result of taking multiple medications.

## **Action:**

**Education:** Operation UNITE received grant money to train prescribers in 2012 concerning prescription drug abuse.

**Patient/Physician Bond:** One doctor suggested physicians should spend quality time developing rapport with patients. This enables prescribers to identify the risk factors which may leave a particular patient more prone to drug abuse.

**Advisory Panel:** In November 2011, Governor Steve Beshear formed an advisory panel of 11 healthcare professionals that will assist authorized agencies identify suspicious prescribing habits from medical professionals.

**Preventing Overdoses:** One pharmacist suggested that Kentucky join 21 other states and expand the access to an opiate antidote known as Nalaxone. This antidote blocks the effect of the opiate to the brain. Other states have kits available allowing a lay person to administer this drug to another lay person who is suspected of a drug overdose.





# COMMUNITY RESPONSE



“Before they eat breakfast, at the bus stop, or on the bus they’re taking prescription drugs and by the time they get to school they’re overdosing,”

~Don Reid, Principal of Kennedy Metro Middle School~

“Our kids know far more than we ever will about this problem and have the ability to lead by example and change the culture of their communities.”

~Karen Kelly, Operation UNITE~

## **Challenge:**

**Teens Intoxicated in School:** Many speakers expressed great concern for teenagers in the Commonwealth. Don Reid, the principal of an alternative high school in Kentucky, said that there were 13,000 suspensions in Jefferson County schools last year. Many of the suspensions occurred because kids were found in school possessing, distributing or under the influence of prescription narcotics. According to Reid, one of the major challenges with prescription drugs is that, unlike other drugs, narcotics don’t offer a detectable odor or always cause unorthodox behavior; so it becomes difficult for teachers to detect the users.

**Open Medicine Cabinets:** Kentucky Attorney General Conway said that when he speaks to middle school students about prescription drug abuse, somewhere between 70 and 80% of the kids say their parents do not lock up their medicine cabinets.

## **Action:**

**Peer-to-Peer Education:** Operation UNITE trains high school students about the danger of drugs and then in turn, the high school kids teach younger students about the dangers of prescription drug abuse.

**Teacher/Student Rapport:** Reid encouraged teachers across Kentucky to build rapport and trust with their students so students feel comfortable reporting others who abuse prescription drugs.

**Teacher Education:** Reid also recommended that teachers receive education on how to identify symptoms of prescription drug abuse so they can better recognize which students are under the influence. Additionally, he suggested schools hire a nurse for treatment purposes.

**Drug Disposal:** DEA sponsors national take back days to give people an opportunity to properly dispose of unwanted or expired medication. At the take back day in October 2011, Americans turned in more than 377,000 pounds of medication that was subsequently destroyed. There are multiple disposal sites in Kentucky. Operation Unite offers training on proper storage and disposal of medications to communities across the state.

**Student Media Outlets:** Approximately 15 high schools across the state sent journalism students to the summit to write a story on the event for their respective school's yearbook or student newspaper in hopes of spreading the word about prescription drug abuse.



## CONCLUSION

The Commonwealth of Kentucky faces a daunting challenge from the rising tide of prescription drug abuse. The mounting death toll, increased crime, enormous drain on public resources and shattered families throughout the Commonwealth provide stark proof of the magnitude of the problem. The Summit sounded a call to action to citizens from all walks of life to join the fight against prescription drug abuse. Success in this fight requires an integrated, multidisciplinary approach. It is a fight that Kentucky can't afford to lose.







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