

Monthly Columns

by Attorney General Jack Conway



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There is an epidemic in Kentucky that is claiming lives and shattering families. Prescription drug abuse is the second leading cause of accidental death in Kentucky, and during the past five years, fatal drug overdoses have doubled. Sadly, Kentucky led the nation in the use of prescription drugs for non-medical purposes in 2008. This addiction is killing people, young and old, in every corner of the Commonwealth. Far too many families, mine included, have been touched by this problem.

On August 20, I was pleased to announce the creation of Kentucky's first statewide prescription drug abuse task force. A \$50,000 grant from the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators (NADDI) will serve as seed money to intensify our investigations statewide into doctor shopping, drug trafficking, overprescribing physicians and illegal out-of-state pharmacies. The task force currently has five investigators from my office and two from law enforcement departments in Eastern Kentucky, once considered to be the prescription pain-pill capital of the U.S. We are in the process of soliciting participation in the task force from law enforcement agencies in communities across Kentucky. The task force should be up and running this fall.

As Attorney General, I have made fighting prescription drug abuse a priority. One of the first meetings I had after taking office was with 5th District Congressman Hal Rogers (R-Somerset) to forge a partnership that continues today with Operation UNITE, a task force Rogers founded in 2005 in Eastern Kentucky. Investigators from my Drug Investigations Branch are now assigned to Operation UNITE. They have also worked closely with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) task force and the Kentucky All Schedule Prescription Electronic Reporting (KASPER) system, which tracks controlled substance prescriptions dispensed in the state.

Even facing 20% budget cuts, I made sure we devoted additional resources and took a comprehensive approach to addressing

the scourge of prescription drug abuse in our communities. I am pleased with our accomplishments:

- Prescription Drugs Seized: 4,397
- Cases Opened: 257
- KASPER Requests: 675
- Search Warrants: 39
- Arrests: 68 on 169 counts
- Indictments: 41 on 238 counts
- Participated in Drug Round-Ups: 12

In addition to our law enforcement efforts, I have made legislative efforts to combat prescription drug abuse. I lobbied lawmakers and attorneys general to help pass the Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Act. This federal law is similar to Kentucky's groundbreaking Internet Pharmacy Law that makes it illegal to ship prescriptions to people unless they have a prescription provided by a doctor after an in-person evaluation.

I also plan to collaborate with Governor Beshear to provide our investigators with greater access to the KASPER system to identify the top prescribers of schedule II-IV controlled substances. Additionally, my office has filed suit against Purdue Pharma, the manufacturer of Oxycontin, for falsely marketing its product to doctors and patients, creating addicts and tearing families apart.

As I've done with my cybercrimes initiatives, I will work closely with Kentucky families affected by this problem. Ultimately, it is families who are on the front line of this battle. They are the ones who live this nightmare day-in and day-out.

Prescription pill abuse is robbing Kentucky of good kids, like 19-year-old Sarah Shay and 22-year-old Savannah Kissick, both of Morehead. Their mothers, Dr. Karen Shay and Lynn Kissick, have pledged to help us as we work to educate Kentucky families about the devastating effects of pain pills and addiction.

Working together, we can combat this problem and make Kentucky a safer place to live, work and raise a family.

Jack Conway
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