

# Human Costs of Prescription Drugs

**"For generations we've suffered from all kinds of pain - without the kinds of health services we needed to deal with addiction and depression."**

By Natasha Watts

*Eastern Kentucky is home to one of the largest prescription drug problems in the county, and one of the most abused drugs is a painkiller called OxyContin. This year the maker of that drug, Purdue Pharma, has paid hundreds of millions of dollars in damages for misleading the public about OxyContin's addictive qualities. Commentator Natasha Watts describes the human costs that prescription drug addictions have brought to her community.*

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Imagine you are sitting in a room with everyone you love, your elementary school teachers, neighbors, childhood friends. And then you leave the room and find out that every single one of those people is an addict. That's how I felt when I returned home after four years away at college. I have no social circle here anymore, one friend I have struggles with her ex-boyfriend as he tries to recover. Almost all of my other friends are addicted to prescription drugs. The epidemic has touched my life also, but in a place where you don't air your dirty laundry, it's not something I can talk about.

Kids growing up in my hometown now don't remember a time when families weren't affected by drug use. For them the addiction epidemic is just part of the landscape, just another abandoned building.

It's not hard to see how we got to this point. With hundreds of injured coal miners, this area has one of the highest chronic pain rates in the country. For generations we've suffered from all kinds of pain - without the kinds of health services we needed to deal with addiction and depression.

OxyContin isn't the ONLY drug being abused in this area. I remember in high school watching kids I had known since kindergarten, crush pills and snort them on their desks.

I know families who are spending every dime to get their loved ones sober. Nothing seems to work. It's easy to blame the victims and write it off as a "hillbilly problem". But I definitely see some shared responsibility with drug companies who are finally facing penalties.

There's a culture of addiction in eastern Kentucky now. Just taking one drug away won't erase that. The things I valued most in my community have changed forever: trust between neighbors, and intact families.

We're going to live with the human costs of addiction here for generations. Addicts who get clean still won't be able to find jobs in our coal-dependent economy. The mother who finally gets her kids back from the courts won't be able to make up for all the years apart. We have paid for the addiction epidemic with our sisters', brothers', mothers', fathers', grandparents' and friends' lives. Millions of dollars don't even begin to cover those costs.