

OxyContin and the Opium Epidemic of the 21st Century

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Beginning over two hundred years ago, the opium plant was credited with being implicated in destroying the Chinese dynasties that had ruled China for thousands of years prior to The Republic of China being created in 1912. With opium reaching China's shores in increasing amounts, the Chinese Emperor, Ch'ien Chieh, has been attributed to the following quote in 1811: "This item, opium, spreads deadly poison. Rascals and bandits indulge in it and cannot do without it even for a second. They do not save their own earnings for food and clothes, but instead exchange their money for the pleasure of this narcotic. Not only do they willingly bring ruin upon their own lives, but they also persuade friends to follow their example. Previously, we decreed its prohibition, yet treacherous merchants still buy and sell it. When people smoke it, they may be incited to do all sorts of evil. When smoking becomes a habit, then they cannot stop even though they want to. Thus they bankrupt themselves and even lose their lives".



It is my contention that we presently are well into the first 12 years of what future historians will refer to as the "opium epidemic of the 21st century". From a historical perspective, in the beginning of the 20th century it is reported that 27% of the adult male population in China was estimated to be addicted to opium. With the recent dramatic increase in raw opium being imported into our country to make oxycodone ([OxyContin](#)), hydrocodone (Vicodin), and all the legal opium derivatives, the statistics available from a number of government agencies can help surmise the number of addicts that have been created since the introduction of OxyContin by the FDA in 1996.

Thousands of years ago, opium was originally ingested as the pure juice from the plant and later manipulated into a formulation that could be smoked for instant gratification. The various alkaloids (natural constituents) within the opium plant can also create or be changed into additional addictive and deadly molecular entities in various forms. In 1803 Morphine was isolated from the plant and with the invention of the hypodermic syringe in 1853 morphine was a welcome miracle during the Civil War. However, the 400,000 morphine addicts, better known as "the soldier's disease", created after the war is seldom discussed. In the late 1800's Heroin was synthesized from Morphine. In 1916 Oxycodone (active ingredient of OxyContin) was created and Hydrocodone (active ingredient in (Vicodin) was discovered in 1920. With the epidemics of pneumonia and tuberculosis in the late 1800's, heroin was introduced as a "cough product". In 1943 hydrocodone was approved by the FDA as a cough suppressant and oxycodone made its inroads into medicine via an approval of the drug Percodan in 1950. It is important to note that whether the active ingredients for euphoria come from the pure opium juice or a product that is derived from the opium plant the results of potential addiction, withdrawal and possible death are identical.

The history of our drug laws make for interesting reading in conjunction with our history of racial phobias. In the 1850's San Francisco leaders had a fear that "white people were starting to smoke opium with the Chinese" which led to a ban on opium smoking in that city. Later, William Randolph Hearst reported that "white women were being seduced by Chinese men in opium dens. Southern Democrats supported stricter laws on narcotics because "the cocaine crazed Negro brain" was creating problems. In the 1930's it was stated that "Mexicans were marijuana users and marijuana use caused violence". In other words, the original drug laws were passed for the blatantly wrong reasons!

However, we now have before us the cold statistics of deaths, addictions, production increases, emergency room visits, robberies, thefts, daily news accounts, police reports, etc., and we have a collective governing body, officials, experts and media who remain silent on the growing epidemic being created by drug companies and medical charlatans who will produce and distribute as much addictive product that they possibly can. Over one

hundred years ago irrational logic passed rational laws and today we have modern information allowing irrational outcomes.

The drug companies have been ingenious in promoting the opium plant, the same molecular entity that has a history of destroying communities and families for thousands of years. In the drug company's promotional campaigns, the public is presented with an individual who is in true need of relief and support. The results have become a convoluted outcome that includes an epidemic of death and addiction. In this period of history, for the opium poppy, the destruction is being fostered under the guise of "pain relief". In spite of no long term studies or weak documentation at best that conclusively support the use of opium derivatives for chronic pain relief, the distribution of the opioids continues to increase. The same doctors who distribute thousands of pills that include oxycodone and hydrocodone do not understand the causes of addiction and "cravings". The doctors who prescribe the addictive products cannot describe addiction, explain addiction or put addiction into a reasonable biological description. However, we continue to give unqualified doctors a carte blanche on distribution. If someone was selling OxyContin in your front yard, you would be calling the police during the first drug deal.

Before OxyContin, pain was a symptom of a physical ailment. Somehow "pain" has become a "disease state" in itself. The growth of the "pain management" industry has fostered addiction and death in numbers never seen before. Our family members are not becoming addicted or dying from the "disease of pain", but from the new growing disease of addiction and misuse fostered by the misrepresentation of treating pain.

The end result has been that the opium plant was recently limited to a few areas of our cities in the form of heroin and has now become a part of every street and community in America in the form of oxycodone and hydrocodone. Every newspaper has recently reported on a death, robbery, or crime directly related to the opium plant. I continue to wait for the American leaders, public officials and the media to begin to understand the cause of the growing epidemic they have started to report on, but still do not understand.

Does the "5000 year old" opium plant have its place in modern medicine? Absolutely! But let's begin to have rational discussions about the plant and rational solutions that will stop the growth of death and addiction our drug companies promote, with the FDA and medical profession's complicity, that continue to go unabated in our country and the world.

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