

# ADDICTION IN DREAMLAND

## A Conversation with Sam Quinones

Monday, January 28, at 7 p.m.  
Friends of the USC Libraries Lecture Hall  
Doheny Memorial Library 240  
University of Southern California

### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- ◉ Sam Quinones is an L.A.-based journalist and the author of several books, including *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic* (2015), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award.
- ◉ Melissa Durham (moderator) is an assistant professor of clinical pharmacy at USC.
- ◉ Quinones posits that “wherever [prescription painkillers go], heroin comes.” He conceived of the book as “twin tales of drug marketing,” drawing parallels between pharmaceutical companies and heroin dealers.
- ◉ The United States is currently experiencing an opioid epidemic, with drug overdoses being a leading cause of injury and death. The American Medical Association released a statement in November 2018 saying, “The trend of declining life expectancy in the United States is deeply concerning and demands an all-hands-on-deck approach to reverse course. Even as we’ve made gains in fighting chronic conditions such as cancer and heart disease, the twin plagues of suicide and opioid misuse have all but erased those gains.”

### THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC BY THE NUMBERS

- ◉ 700,000+ — number of Americans who died of a drug overdose from 1999 to 2017; about 400,000 of those deaths involved an opioid
- ◉ 68% — percentage of the 70,200 drug overdoses in 2017 that involved an opioid

- ◉ 130 — number of people who die in the U.S. every day from an opioid overdose
- ◉ \$78.5 billion — total economic burden of prescription opioid abuse in the United States per year, including health care, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and involvement of the criminal-legal system
- ◉ 80% — percentage of people today who use heroin who first misused prescription opioids

Sources: *The National Institute on Drug Abuse* ([drugabuse.gov](http://drugabuse.gov)); the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

### WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Opioids are a class of drugs that includes heroin, morphine, and fentanyl. A number of brand-name prescription painkillers contain morphine (which is a poppy-plant-based opioid) or fentanyl (a synthetic opioid made in a laboratory), such as OxyContin, Vicodin, Percocet, and many others. These drugs attach to opioid receptors in the brain cells, prompting the cells to release signals that muffle the perception of pain and boost feelings of pleasure.

### WHAT IS THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC?

The opioid epidemic refers to the high incidence of opioid addiction and death from opioid overdoses. It has arisen, and escalated rapidly, over the last few decades.

In the 1990s, after being reassured by pharmaceutical companies (whose business is to sell drugs) that prescription opioid pain relievers were not addictive, medical providers began prescribing

them at greater rates. It was not long before it became clear that the drugs are indeed highly addictive, and opioid overdose rates began to increase. Compounding the situation, people who had become addicted to opioids but who could no longer access prescription painkillers found it easy, and cheaper, to access heroin, and abuse of this illegal drug began to increase.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention outlines three waves of rising opioid overdose deaths. One wave began in the 1990s, coinciding with the increase in prescriptions of opioid painkillers. The next wave of deaths started in 2010, with increases in overdoses involving heroin. A third wave began in 2013, with increases in overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids, especially those involving fentanyl.

## VOCABULARY

**addiction** – drug addiction is a substance-use disorder in which a person is chronically unable to control their use of a harmful substance, in spite of the harm it causes; it is considered a brain disorder because it involves functional changes to brain circuits that may persist long after the person has stopped taking the drug

**dependence** – drug dependence refers to a state in which a person only functions normally with the drug; that is, there are physical withdrawal symptoms when the drug is removed

**substance abuse** – the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and drugs

## EXPLAIN HOW A SINGLE PARAGRAPH OF MEDICAL LITERATURE PROPELLED THE OXYCONTIN EPIDEMIC.

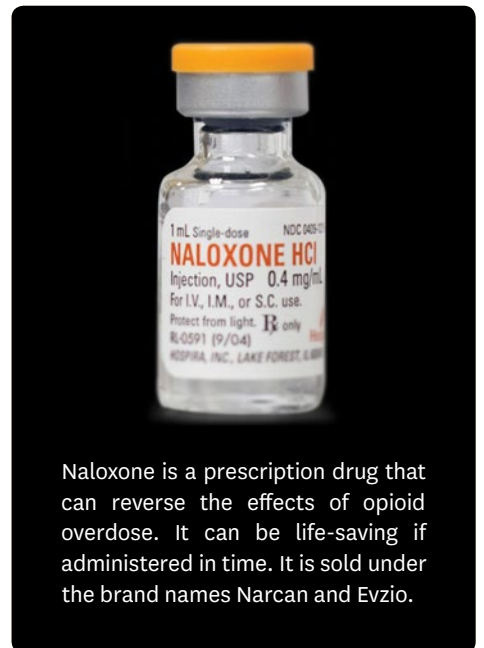
This letter was forgotten by the guy who wrote it [Dr. Hershel Jick, in a 101-word letter to the editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*] . . . The letter said he checked his [medical] database and found 11,000-plus patients who were given narcotic painkillers in the hospital; only four got addicted. He wrote that in a letter, sent it in, they published it in 1980, and he quickly forgot it.

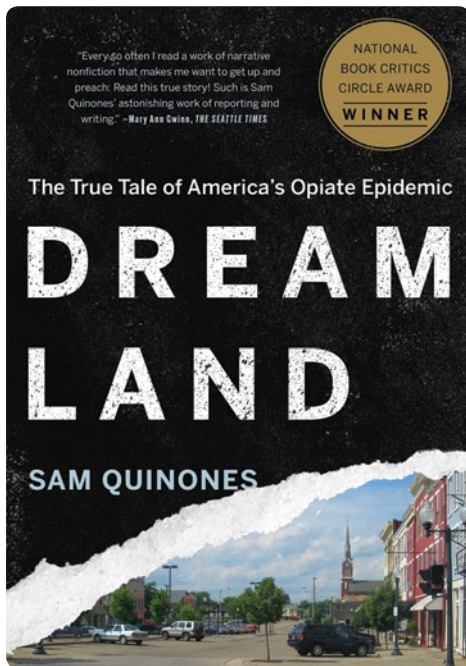
That was later picked up by the pain specialists who wanted to break down this phobia [of addiction] with regard to pain treatment by opioids, and they ran with it . . . Nobody bothered to read it . . . First it was called a report, then it was called a study, then it was called a landmark report, and then finally a landmark study, and in none of these cases was that a correct description . . . I kept thinking, “This can’t be possible, this is not true, how can one little letter that is nothing, a toss-off, have changed so many minds?”

—excerpted from “Sam Quinones Outlines the Path of Addiction from Painkiller to Heroin” by Matt Pearce, *L.A. Times*, April 10, 2015

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Have you been affected by the opioid epidemic? Think about the ways addiction affects not only the addict, but also families, friends, coworkers, medical providers, and many others.
- Why do you think the “one little letter” Quinones referred to was able to make such an impact?
- Did you hear anything at the event that shifted your perception of addiction or the opioid epidemic?
- Do you think there is an antidote to the epidemic? What is it?





## IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THIS ISSUE, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT

- The National Institute on Drug Abuse [drugabuse.gov](http://drugabuse.gov)
- P.A.I.N. (Prescription Addiction Intervention Now), an activist project founded by artist (and opioid addiction survivor) Nan Goldin and colleagues [sacklerpain.org](http://sacklerpain.org)

## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

**AMY CHATFIELD** of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this evening's event. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. journal articles and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](http://libraries.usc.edu).

### BOOKS

Quinones, Sam. *Dreamland: the True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2015. Doheny Memorial Library, Bookstacks, HV5840.M4 Q56 2015

Hanson, Glen, Peter Venturelli, and Annette Fleckenstein. *Drugs and Society*. 13th ed. Burlington: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2018. Full text available online, via the Library's Search option.

Meier, Barry. *Pain Killer: A "Wonder" Drug's Trail of Addiction and Death*. Emmaus: St. Martin's Press, 2003. Doheny Memorial Library, Bookstacks, HV5822.O99 M45 2003

Macy, Beth. *Dopesick*. New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2018. Leavey Library, Lobby-2 MCN 3948.

### ARTICLES

Quinones, Sam. "Serving all Your Heroin Needs [Op-Ed]." *New York Times*, April 19, 2015.

Keefe, Patrick Radden. "The Family That Built an Empire of Pain." *The New Yorker*, October 30, 2017.

Epstein, David H., Markus Heilig, and Yavin Shaham. "Science-based Actions Can Help Address the Opioid Crisis." *Trends in Pharmacological Sciences* 39, no. 11 (2018):911-916.

deShazo, Richard D., McKenzie Johnson, Ike Eriator, and Kathryn Rodenmeyer. "Backstories on the US Opioid Epidemic. Good Intentions Gone Bad, an Industry Gone Rogue, and Watch Dogs Gone to Sleep." *The American Journal of Medicine* 131, no. 6 (2018):595-601.

### WEBSITES

"Help, Resources, and Information: National Opioids Crisis." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website. Last modified December 21, 2018. [www.hhs.gov/opioids](http://www.hhs.gov/opioids)

"Understanding Drug Use and Addiction." National Institute on Drug Abuse website. Last modified June 2018. [www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction](http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction)

"What's Your Story." Sam Quinones: Journalist & Author personal website. Accessed January 10, 2019. [www.samquinones.com/whats-your-story](http://www.samquinones.com/whats-your-story)

