

**7.** Most prescription medication that is abused is obtained directly from doctors through “doctor shopping”

According to a report published by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in 2012, 55% of all pain relievers that are obtained by those who have died are obtained for free through others. Many addicts are given the medication or steal it from people they know.

Many people inadvertently contribute to the overdose issue by leaving their prescription medication in the medicine cabinets or in drawers in their house, sometimes for many years after the drug was prescribed. Guests who visit, many of whom would never be suspected of abusing drugs, steal it.

If you have prescription drugs in your house, do not dispose of them by flushing them in the sewage system. This contaminates the water system. Find the nearest take-back box collection site by visiting [www.dea.gov](http://www.dea.gov) or call (800)882-9539.

**8.** The overdose death issue is mostly a Western Pennsylvania issue and maybe just a Westmoreland County issue.

The issue of prescription drug overdoses is a regional and national crisis. Certainly it is bad in the entire state. Our state is tied for 14<sup>th</sup> worst state in the country in pain reliever overdose deaths, according to a 2013 CDC report.

The four state region of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky are all in the top 14, making this the worst region in the country. No other states have more than two contiguous states in the top 12 states for overdose deaths. West Virginia is the worst state in the country, overtaking New Mexico in 2013. That makes this region the worst in the country.

**9.** If you take away the demand for drugs with better education and stronger consequences, the problem will decrease.

Certainly education and consequences are important. The Penn State EPIS Center reports a Return On Investment (ROI) of prevention programs of \$5 to \$25 for every \$1 invested in evidence based prevention programs. But education and stronger consequences are not the “magic pill,” (no pun intended) to deal with this problem. There is no magic pill.

Thinking of this in supply and demand terms, simply dealing with the problem on the demand side of the equation is being naïve about what is happening on the supply side, as well as not recognizing that the tougher drug laws enacted in the past 20 years have been relatively ineffective to solve this problem. Our jails are now full of

inmates with drug problems. The problem is getting worse.

Speaking to the supply side of the equation, there was 4 times more prescription pain relievers delivered to doctor’s offices and hospitals from 1999 to 2010 in the United States, according to the CDC. Prescription medication is readily available through many different avenues than 14 years ago. Part of the solution is to deal with the supply part of the equation.

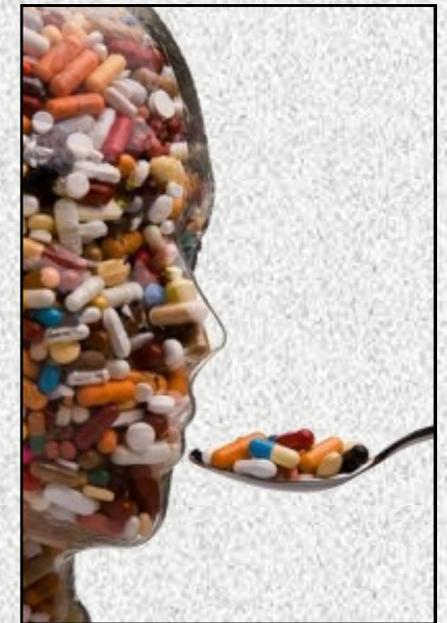
**10.** This drug problem is a problem. (Fill in the blank with your choice of: crime, public health, moral, spiritual, legislative, family breakdown, or other problem of your choice.)

This is not a one dimensional problem. Subsequently, a one dimensional solution is not likely to work. It will take effective change in many areas to have an impact.

[www.co.westmoreland.pa.us](http://www.co.westmoreland.pa.us)



# Top 10 Myths About the Westmoreland County



Information provided by:  
Westmoreland County 2012 & 2013  
Coroner’s Reports  
[www.co.westmoreland.pa.us](http://www.co.westmoreland.pa.us)  
and  
2012 & 2013 Center for Disease  
Control report  
[http://www.cdc.gov/  
homeandrecreationalafety/rxbrief](http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/rxbrief)

**1.** Our young people are dying in droves in the drug epidemic.

It is mostly people over 41 years of age who have died of overdose in the past two years in Westmoreland County.

Number of overdose deaths over the age of 41:

2012: 47 of 78 people (60%)

2013: 55 of 86 people (64%)

Number of overdose deaths over the age of 31:

2012: 62 of 78 people (79%)

2013: 66 of 86 people (77%)

Number of overdose deaths under the age of 20:

2012: 2 of 78 people (2.5%)

2013: 5 of 86 people (5.8%)

**2.** Heroin is causing most of the deaths.

Though heroin use is certainly on the increase because it is cheap and available, it is not causing most of the deaths.

Number of overdose deaths with heroin in their system:

2012: 27 of 78 people

2013: 26 of 86 people

Number of overdose deaths with prescription medications in their system:

2012: 51 of 78 people

2013: 60 of 86 people

Many overdoses are due to “acute combined drug toxicity”, which is the combination of drugs in a persons system leading to death.

**3.** The overdose death problem has been an issue for only a couple of years.

The number of deaths has climbed steadily since 2002, with the exception of slight dips during 2007 and 2008 in this 10 year upward trend of deaths. In 2002, there were 22 overdose deaths. That number has increased 291% in Westmoreland County to 86 in 2013.

The overdoses have been the leading cause of death among accidents and suicides in Westmoreland County in 7 of the last 8 years. There have been record overdose death numbers for four years in a row.

Those numbers don't take into account all of the cases of overdoses where the victim survived. Excelsa Health Emergency Rooms reported treating nearly 400 near-fatal overdoses in 2012. There were likely more near-fatal overdose cases of county residents than this treated by other health care providers. Near fatal overdose cases far exceed the deaths each year of this epidemic.

**4.** The problem is predominantly in “bad” neighborhoods or the “worst” towns.

The worst concentration of deaths in 2012 was found in Derry (includes Derry and New Alexander) and Hempfield (includes Greensburg, New Stanton, and Jeannette).

In 2013, this shifted to Hempfield Township, New Kensington, and South Huntingdon Township.

The truth is the problem is spread throughout the county. This epidemic knows no cultural, geographic, or economic boundaries.

**5.** I don't know anyone personally who has died or O.D.'ed. The problem doesn't affect me.

If you are lucky enough not to be affected personally by not knowing anyone who has died or overdosed, the problem is hitting you in the pocketbook. One of our county judges, Judge Alfred Bell, hears dozens of cases a week on retail theft, many that take place at large retail stores. He believes that 90% of the cases are related to drugs. Addicts go to the stores to steal items for resale in order to feed their habit. Judge Bell often orders a substance abuse assessment for retail theft cases if the accused has been using drugs.

This amount of retail thefts drives the price of goods up for everybody.

If you are an employer, you need to be concerned. Current employers who do drug testing regularly complain that a significant amount of applicants for jobs fail the initial drug test. They say positive drug tests make it difficult to find qualified people to hire.

**6.** These addicts choose their fate. They deserve what they get.

Many people begin their addiction by being prescribed pain relievers as a result of a car accident, health issue, or an injury. In their recovery, they become addicted and have a difficult time stopping their use. When their prescription runs out, they turn to other ways to satisfy their addiction by taking drugs from people they know, buying prescription medication illegally from others, “doctor shopping” for additional medication, or turning to street drugs such as heroin.

***No one's ambition is to be a drug addict.***