

Key:

**K = Judge Irene M. Keeley**

K: West Virginia, where I currently serve as a senior district judge, has the nation's highest rate of opioid-related overdose deaths. But opioid abuse is not just a problem in West Virginia. It is a national public health emergency that affects both the federal and state court systems. The statistics are staggering.

On average, 130 Americans die every day from an opioid-related drug overdose, and more than four hundred thousand Americans have died from overdoses related to opioids, including prescription and illicit opioids. In 2017, more than two million people were identified as having an opioid use disorder. This is especially relevant to the courts, as individuals with opioid use disorder are over-represented in the criminal justice system, and judges will increasingly see litigants and others affected by opioids. Understanding the basics of opioids, as well as the mechanisms and pathways that underlie opioid use disorder and pain management is becoming more necessary for judges to comprehend in the face of the opioid crisis.

However, comprehension of opioid use is not just about biology. Sociocultural and socioeconomic factors, geographic disparities, adverse life events and trauma, and a lack of coping skills and support networks have been shown to relate to opioid use and abuse. The medical field continues to respond to the opioid crisis through such avenues as medically assisted treatment, medication for opioid use disorder, and the increased availability of naloxone, the medication approved by the FDA to prevent overdose by opioids.

However, the courts must also play a role and serve their communities. In this rapidly developing field, courts must wrestle with difficult decisions when opioid use is involved in a case. For example, how should courts treat individuals who are prescribed drugs to help them with their opioid use? How does the use of medically assisted treatment affect conditions of supervised release? And what can the courts do in the face of this public health emergency?

This program seeks to assist judges by providing a basic understanding of opioid use and its effect on the federal courts. The presentations not only will include discussions of the biology and science of opioid use, but also discussions of the non-biological contributors, such as sociocultural factors and past trauma. Importantly, there will also be presentations regarding treatment of opioid use disorder, both inside and outside of the criminal justice system. Learning how to respond to the opioid epidemic should be essential for all judges. I hope that you will find this discussion beneficial and leave with a series of takeaways you can readily apply in your own court.