

This could be the cure for drug crisis in America's prisons



By [Nicole Sinclair](#) November 4, 2015 1:11 PM

<http://finance.yahoo.com/news/opioid-drug-addiction-treatment-could-be-part-of-prison-crisis-solution-211819012.html>

Drug overdoses now cause more deaths than car crashes, with opioids like Oxycontin [killing 44 people a day](#), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). And treatment protocol for individuals addicted to opioids has largely been methodone, which has addictive qualities itself.

Vivitrol, the first and only non-narcotic treatment of opioid dependence, saw sales grow almost 50% year-over-year last quarter, a statistic that Alkermes ([ALKS](#)) CEO Richard Pops says reflects strong demand.

Alternatives like methodone have substituted for illicitly acquired opioids in the past, but still have highly addictive qualities. Vivitrol, in a six-month study, showed that after detox, opioid-dependent patients who took Vivitrol and participated in counseling had significantly higher rates of complete abstinence.

Leerink Swann analyst Paul Matteis reiterated the strength of Vivitrol: "We believe the product has significant long-term growth potential as the market still looks underpenetrated -- while recent revenue numbers have impressed, a small percentage of addiction providers are very high prescribers of Vivitrol, offering Alkermes an attractive commercial opportunity to generate broader use over time."

[A New York Times article](#) this weekend highlighted the increasing use of heroin among white, affluent families -- a demographic shift that has begun to alter response from government to treat it as a disease instead of a crime.

What is addiction?

On why we are only now starting to see this more as a disease instead of a crime, Pops says it's because of the data. "We are starting to develop data that shows that treatment of this as a disease leads to better outcomes. If we ignore it and incarcerate folks, they simply come back out of prison and recidivate," he says.

Additionally, there are 100 programs in 30 states using Vivitrol -- including state programs, drug courts, DUI courts, jail and prison re-entry.

"What drove Vivitrol's use in the criminal justice system first was judges themselves," according to Pops. "Court judges who got tired of putting the same people in prison again and again figured out that a once-a-month injection of Vivitrol could keep someone in the community, getting treatment, working, paying taxes, rather than incarcerating them and never really changing the cycle they were experiencing."

More from Yahoo Finance

[New schizophrenia drug has potential for aiding mental health system](#)