

Dear Editor:

The January 13th cover story entitled “A Dark Addiction” sheds light on a national epidemic that has left millions of families across America searching for help.

According to the National Institutes of Health, an estimated 48 million people (ages 12 and older) have used prescription drugs for non-medical reasons in their lifetimes. With 20% percent of the American population having been engaged in prescription drug abuse – we simply cannot continue to ignore this problem.

Furthermore, over the past ten years there has been a 300% increase in the number of teens seeking treatment for addiction to prescription pain relievers.

One reason for the dramatic increase in prescription drug addiction is the relative ease in which addicts are able to buy their prescriptions. Addicts are able to go from one doctor’s office to another receiving prescriptions that will help feed their addiction. There needs to be a national database giving doctors and pharmacists the ability to see if their patients have been given a prescription by another doctor or pharmacy.

In 2005, I introduced and the President signed into law the National All Schedules Prescription Electronic Reporting Act (NASPER), making it the only authorized program to assist states in combating prescription drug abuse of controlled substances, through prescription drug monitoring programs.

In passing NASPER, Congress intended to enable healthcare practitioners and law enforcement officials to detect and thwart “doctor shopping” by addicts crossing State lines by ensuring that State prescription monitoring programs can share prescription data based on uniform data collection and privacy protections.

Unfortunately, NASPER has yet to receive any funding even though it passed Congress with broad bipartisan support.

A common sense approach to reduce drug abuse is to block the most common avenue for addicts to receive their drugs.

As prescription drug abuse continues to rise and claim more American lives, it is urgent that a comprehensive approach, such as NASPER, be implemented as soon as possible. Congress took the initial step in authorizing the program, now they must fund it.

Sincerely,
U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield
First District, Kentucky