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## Introduction

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## INTRODUCTION

*Christina Marie Nunez\**

Instead of gathering on the Mississippi College School of Law campus for a full day of panels and discussions, attendees for the 2020 *Mississippi College Law Review* Symposium logged onto Zoom for four consecutive Fridays over the lunch hour for virtual presentations. Originally set to take place on April 3, 2020, the symposium was cancelled in response to the global health crisis caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19). The cancellation of this annual event was yet another stark reminder that the COVID-19 pandemic had permeated every aspect of life and changed the way we gathered as a community.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, it became even more important to remind ourselves that the United States was still facing an ongoing epidemic: the opioid crisis. It is difficult to predict the true threat the COVID-19 pandemic poses to the already vulnerable population suffering from opioid addiction. Still, there is expectation that the effects of the pandemic on the epidemic will be significant.<sup>1</sup> The Mississippi College School of Law community and the symposium speakers should be commended for recognizing the importance of raising awareness of this crucial issue and adapting the symposium to a virtual platform.

Carver Brown of Creative Addiction Services kicked off the virtual symposium with his presentation “The Road to Recovery.” Bombarded with increasingly grim statistics of opioid-related deaths, all too often, we become desensitized to the opioid crisis. We lose sight of the fact that behind every statistic is an individual, a story, a life. Mr. Brown was gracious enough to share his personal journey of addiction and recovery that emphasized the private aspects of the opioid crisis. Addiction is indiscriminate. It is likely that symposium participants know of family and friends suffering from addiction but do not know how to help them. Mr. Brown’s candid discussion included resources and invaluable insight based

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1. Molly McCann Pineo & Rebecca Schwartz, *Commentary on the Coronavirus Pandemic: Anticipating a Fourth Wave in the Opioid Epidemic*, American Psychological Association, *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* Vol. 12 No. S1 (2020).

on his experiences as an interventionist and recovery coach as to how to support those suffering from addiction.

A proper explanation of an epidemic includes a closer analysis of the cause and evolution of the epidemic. In session two of the symposium, “A Provider’s Perspective,” Dr. Claude Brunson and Dr. Randy Easterling gave two extremely informative presentations on how opioid use developed into one of the worst drug epidemics in history. Both Mississippi practitioners and active leaders in the community, Dr. Brunson and Dr. Easterling have witnessed firsthand how the rise of opioid abuse has affected the practice of medicine and negatively impacted the health outcomes of Mississippi citizens. Dr. Brunson and Dr. Easterling were members of Governor Phil Bryant’s Opioid and Heroin Study Taskforce. Their presentations and past leadership exemplify the necessary multidisciplinary approach to understanding the opioid crisis.

The opioid crisis rages on, and developing and enforcing laws to address the epidemic may seem an insurmountable task. Fortunately, individuals such as symposium session three speaker John Meynardie have dedicated years of service towards prosecuting narcotics cases. Mr. Meynardie currently serves as Branch Chief of the United States Attorney’s office for the Southern District of Mississippi in Gulfport. His presentation “Combatting a Crisis: The Law of Opioids” provided a discussion of the evolution of the opioid crisis, the Department of Justice’s multi-pronged approach to the current opioid and heroin crisis, and aspects of federal prosecution under the Controlled Substance Act.

There are always two sides to a case, including those matters involving opioids and other narcotics. During the last symposium session, “The Opioid Crisis and its Potential Effects on Damage Claims,” partner Stephen Peresich of Page, Mannino, Peresich & McDermott, provided an overview of the opioid crisis from the perspective of a legal practitioner who has years of experience defending physicians, hospitals, and other health care providers. As an experienced litigator, Mr. Peresich gave relevant and practical advice on how the opioid crisis has affected his law practice. His presentation included education of applicable laws and a detailed explanation of relevant documents to consider in cases involving opioids and other controlled substances.

It is only through the joint efforts of experts such as our esteemed symposium speakers that the opioid crisis will truly be addressed. The opioid crisis is a multi-faceted epidemic and will require the input of a diverse community with a variety of perspectives. The success of this symposium and past symposiums shows how presentations on one topic, here the opioid crisis, from varying viewpoints can have different but equally impactful effects on the participants.

The world has changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the crises present pre-pandemic will still be prominent, unfortunately perhaps even more so, post-pandemic. Continued recognition of these societal problems through forums such as symposiums ensures we do not lose focus on the challenges that lie ahead. The *Mississippi College Law Review* Symposium is a valuable forum for conversations, discussions, and education on difficult topics such as the opioid crisis. The passion of the symposium speakers and inquisitiveness of the symposium attendees of the 2020 Fall Symposium “The Opioid Crisis: An Epidemic Explained” was truly inspiring, and it was my honor to be a part of it. As members of the legal community, we may have the privilege to find ourselves in positions of power. It is crucial that legal professionals positively use this influence to work with other disciplines to enact significant social change, such as combatting the opioid crisis. 2020 was certainly a challenging year, but the strength of the human spirit through these difficult times provides me with great optimism that we will persevere and ultimately effectively manage the opioid crisis.