

# Photo Illustration

## 2011 KSPA State Competition

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### Description

You are a staff member of Ad Astra High School's The Star. Your editor has asked you to create a photo illustration to go with the attached story.

### School Info

Name: Ad Astra High School  
Location: Aspera, Kansas  
Mascot: Box Turtles  
Enrollment: 850 (grades 9-12)  
School Colors: Green & Gold  
Yearbook: The Honeybee  
Newspaper: The Star

### Contest Info

This is a **carry-in** contest.

Please attach **your assigned contest number** in the upper right-hand corner on the back of your photo.

**Do not** put your name on the entry. If you do, your entry will be disqualified.

Students are not to request help or advice from anyone other than the KSPA Executive Director. All work must be that of the contestant.

### Assignment

Using the information provided in the attached story, design a photo illustration that is not wider than 8 inches and no taller than 10 inches. The photo illustration may be submitted in color or black and white, and should be printed on 8.5 x 11-inch paper.

You may begin with an original photograph or photographs and, using PhotoShop or other editing software, create an image that illustrates the main idea of the story. You may include text, but it is not required.

**You must include** a brief paragraph describing the effects applied to the photo and explaining how your photo illustration helps tell the story.



## Story

They sat in a log cabin set in the middle of a 68-acre tree farm in Dole County. No getaway, mind you, the sober dwelling represents a hard-core reality that Justin Wilson and Patrick Phaltz share as users.

To provide knowledge, maybe even a lesson for AAHS students, the two Ad Astra graduates offered their stories about prescription pill abuse.

"I had life sentences in my car at times," said Justin Wilson, 28.

He acted as a "mule" when he drove from Kansas to Oklahoma to collect and transport sandwich bags filled with thousands of pills.

"My payment was in pills," Wilson said, naming Oxycontin, also known as oxycodone, as his drug of choice.

He knew how to buy pills on the Internet; how much money a single pill commanded on the street; how to sell pills for profit in order to offset losses as a user. Most of all, Wilson knew what doctors to go to and what symptoms to embody.

"There were five or six doctors in my local area who would prescribe anything I asked, and they would meet me on Sundays," Wilson said, explaining the practice as "doctor shopping."

"They were in it for the money."

He is a recovering addict of two years and works as a graphic designer at Aspera Dimensions on the outskirts of town. He also serves as a teacher and mentor for young men ages 14-20 who are part of the secluded recovery program there.

Patrick Phaltz, 19, is one of those teens. Phaltz is a recovering addict of five months who can vividly recall his affairs with heroin, and in its absence, Oxycontin.

His drug use started in middle school with alcohol and steadily progressed, beginning with pills rifled from a medicine cabinet belonging to his friend's mother.

"I thought I was going to be a heroin addict for the rest of my life," Phaltz said. "This is how I'm going to die, with a needle in my arm."

To ward off withdrawal pain, Phaltz turned to Oxycontin as a last resort to make his body feel better somehow.

"You have to have it to get out of bed," Phaltz said. "Withdrawal from opiates, you feel like you're dying."

## Pills post a challenge

The characteristics of drug use presented by Wilson and Phaltz reflect the challenging abuses that face law enforcement.

Phaltz said he gained access to pills as a kid, through unsuspecting parents and grandparents. His addictions spiraled thereafter.

Wilson, an adult for most of his heavy drug use, found his own ways of securing his prescriptions, or another person's. Some of those methods were technically legal.

Users have to be caught in the act, found in possession of pills prescribed to someone else or found in possession of too many pills under their own name to be charged with such a drug crime, said Lt. Scott Fitzgerald, Dole County Multi-Agency Narcotics Squad unit commander.

"It's very tricky when they have a valid prescription," Fitzgerald said. "The drugs are legal when they are prescribed. It's not like cocaine or methamphetamine, where possession at all is illegal."

Pain pills and antidepressants are the prescription meds most people desire, with Oxycontin serving as the heavyweight in the toxic mix, Fitzgerald added.

"(Pill use) poses more of a threat to our youth safety than our illicit drugs do," Fitzgerald said. "The problem that we've seen is that young people who are taking the medication and have overdosed and died were mixing medications and alcohol."

A side issue with prescription drug abusers relates to those same men and women dealing pills in order to fuel their own habit, said Sgt. Kevin McDonald, an Aspera Police Department officer who also works with the MANS unit.

Rampant teenage use presents a myriad of unique problems as well.

They can acquire pills with relative ease, compared with booze or street drugs. They can conceal it better. And they also justify use as medication.

"Especially with kids they say, 'Well, it's a legal drug, it's written by a doctor, so it can't hurt me,'" McDonald said. "They don't look at it as being an illicit drug such as meth or heroin."

## Medication cabinets replace the streets

Rick Spitz is a 35-year veteran of a state agency called Kansas Drugs and Narcotics Agency.

He is the director, a licensed pharmacist and peace officer.

How his office is called to investigate places that dispense narcotics has changed dramatically over decades.

"When I first started, pharmacists were supplying Kansas rock bands or groupies with drugs and dirty doctors who were supplying quaaludes to movies stars," he said. "Most people were (using) street-type drugs. In time, people have learned prescription drugs are out there, too."

Oxycontin was the "bell ringer," Spitz said, that escalated such abuses.

Younger users, in particular, caught on to medications readily available in their parents' medicine cabinets.

"It was originally developed for patients with chronic pain, and for hospice patients," he said.

"It just became wildly popular."

To address what has been identified by state leaders as an epidemic, Spitz joined a host of key experts and law enforcement officials in Wichita on March 2 to discuss the issue of prescription drug abuse in Kansas and its fallout.

There they agreed to push for funding that would establish a prescription monitoring program, which would network pharmacies in Kansas as well as other states.

In the meantime, agencies are sharing information of all kinds on these abuses. County coroners have been asked for their overdose statistics. Kansas State Patrol troopers are reporting serious or fatal accidents in which prescription medication may have been a cause. And complaints are finding Spitz's agency quickly when so called "pill mills" open.

These are cash-only outfits where pills are sometimes dispensed illegally. Right now there are between 30 and 40 around Wichita, he said. The only one known to have opened in Aspera was promptly shut down at the end of last summer for violating operational laws, Spitz said. The case remains under investigation.

"(They're) going to pop up in Aspera," he said. "But police in Kansas talk to each other. We all know we're having trouble. ... It's taken this epidemic to bring us all together."

### Hope and moving on

As Wilson and Phaltz volunteered their stories, teens and young men who are part of the

Aspera Dimensions program worked on various projects outside.

The peer-based focus at the center revolves around choices as well as faith.

"We deal with students who either have addictive lifestyle or have made destructive choices. Most of the time it has started with a cigarette or alcohol.

Here lately we've seen a transition of that into prescript drug use," said Brooks Gregory, executive director. "We focus more on purpose."

Looking ahead with hope is a learning process, the men agreed.

They each know friends who died as a result of drug abuses similar to their own.

And though Phaltz mourns their loss, he views his past as building him into a stronger person today.

"I'm tired of (the deaths). It affects me," he said. "But those are old friends. I have to move on from there. I have to worry about me now."