

# Chestnut's Addiction Archives Offer Most Diverse History Of The Disease

By [Mary Cullen](#) • May 30, 2019



Bloomington-Normal is home to one of the largest and most diverse addiction archives in the U.S.

The Illinois Addiction Archives at Chestnut Health Systems detail the history of addictive substances and treatment dating back to the 19th century.

Russ Hagen, Chestnut's former CEO, said the archives were the primary dream of Bill White, longtime Chestnut employee and now emeritus senior research consultant.

"Bill and I began to study the history of addiction and treatment in the U.S.

and really came to the conclusion that the field of addiction lacked what other fields often have ... There was really no single place where anybody had studied the history and the philosophy of addiction," Hagen said.

And so the addiction archives were born.

From alcohol to morphine to heroin, the history of addictive substances have surprisingly similar stories.

Hagen detailed the use of morphine on civil war soldiers as an example: "Given the state of medicine, they gave it pretty liberally and pretty freely. So if they survived the war, they often came home addicted to morphine."

He said heroin had similar roots. A Chestnut Health Systems article states "heroin first entered medical use in 1898 as a 'non-addictive' alternative to morphine and codeine." As little as five years later, reports pointed to heroin's addictive properties, essentially sending chemists back to the drawing board.

"And then as science and and chemists get busy in their pharmacy companies, they created synthetic substitutes for things like morphine and heroin and those kinds of things. So the current (opioid) crisis really is maybe third or fourth crisis in 150 years," Hagen explained.



But a more common and legal substance took a similar path: alcohol.

A second article from Chestnut Health Systems details the history of America's favorite drug, narrowing in on the use of alcohol during 1920s prohibition. Despite being illegal, alcohol was still brewed, distilled, and smuggled into the U.S. But there was another, less known option: prescribed alcohol.

The article states the American Medical Association came out in favor of prohibition, but made sure a small loophole that alcohol prescribed for medical purposes was allowed and written into the law.

Chestnut goes on to state that physicians wrote an average of 10 million prescriptions for alcohol each year of the 14-year prohibition. And by 1928, doctors brought in an estimated \$40 million per year for whiskey prescriptions, according to the article.

"There were periods when they substituted one substance for another . . . to treat morphine addiction with heroin, not realizing that the substitute was every bit as addicting and damaging as the other. There was a lot of use of cocaine to treat heroin addiction," Hagen said. "And this is just kind of a cycle as people began to recognize that addiction really was a severe health and social problem in our country."

One notable substance not included in Chestnut's archives? Marijuana. While still illegal on the federal level, marijuana research is stunted as states—including Illinois—consider legalized recreational use.

Is legalizing marijuana history repeating itself? Hagen said "perhaps to a certain degree."

"The problem is that it adds another legalized substance that is addictive," Hagen said. "And I think what people might not realize is that in the 1960s, and 70s, the marijuana that was available was much less potent than the marijuana that is available today because they've learned how to hybrid it, and grow it, and that kind of thing ... It just adds the legal substance to the

menu of potentially addicting drugs."

*People like you value experienced, knowledgeable and award-winning journalism that covers meaningful stories in Bloomington-Normal. To support more stories and interviews like this one, [please consider making a contribution.](#)*