Prescription drug abuse/misuse (PDA/M), in particular the abuse of opioid pain relievers (OPR), has reached epidemic proportions in the United States, contributing significantly to a four-fold increase in accidental overdose deaths from prescription narcotics since 1999. This problem is particularly acute in Northeast Tennessee where we see the highest prevalence of OPR prescribing, misuse and its resultant outcomes, addiction, overdose and neonatal abstinence syndrome in the state.

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Out of these meetings grew the ETSU Prescription Drug Abuse and Misuse Working Group (PDA/MWG). In the first year, roughly 7-10 members attended regular meetings of the group. They sought chiefly to share ideas and networks, and by the end of 2012 the list had grown to more than 100, with approximately 30-35 members attending each meeting. The PDA/MWG meetings provide an informal setting that allows for connections to be made between projects and partners. Dozens of new activities and projects have been initiated in these meetings and the consistency of the meeting staff and time has provided the mechanism to keep track of projects and updates. Outcomes of the PDA/MWG collaborative approaches include a PDA/M regional summit, multiple research publications, 5 accredited grand round events; several grant proposal submissions, dozens of presentations, and the establishment of a Carter County anti-drug coalition.

Billy Brooks received his undergraduate degree in statistics from the University of North Carolina at Asheville in 2010, going on to earn an MPH in biostatistics from ETSU in 2012. Currently he is completing his doctoral dissertation at the ETSU College of Public Health in the discipline of biostatistics and epidemiology. Billy’s research interests include prescription drug abuse and dependency measurement in rural populations and latent classes of drug users across population sub-groups.