

### INTRODUCTION

The opioid epidemic has been a growing problem over the past few years but can be traced back all the way to the late 90's where people became addicted due to the misuse of prescriptions. Chronic pain is one of the issues when it comes to opioid pain management. In 2015 the amount of opioid prescribed "was the equivalent of 640 milligrams of morphine for every man, woman and child in America—enough to keep someone medicated round the clock for three weeks with a Vicodin every four hours". (Azar, para.14, 2018). This is part of the problem and one of the main causes of this epidemic. When a patient's prescription ends, the medication is highly addictive and prescribed incorrectly. In fact, "a majority of America's heroin users started by misusing a legal opioid, whether one they were prescribed or one they bought or obtained from someone else"(Azar, para. 20, 2018). It is an epidemic because of the vast amount of people dying.

### SIGNIFICANCE

The amount of opioid deaths is more than any other drugs combined which is why it is seen as such an issue. According to Smith (2019):

- In 2015, the United States saw 52,404 deaths from drug overdose
- 63% of the deaths related to drug use in 2015, were tied to opioids
- In 2016 the deaths related to opioids grew by nearly 10,000 (Smith, para. 6, 2019).

About "80% of people using heroin started with a prescription to another opioid" (Smith, para. 4, 2019).

Just like in a case with a young mother from Philadelphia who now struggles with addiction "after going home with 30 Percocet after getting her wisdom teeth out" (Azar, para. 21, 2018). It's stories like this that make you realize all the different people this epidemic affects.

It is not just addicts struggling, it is also people who just went to the doctor for a broken finger and left with an opioid prescription for pain.

### POSITION STATEMENT

There are innovative ways and solutions to the current opioid epidemic. This affects people of every walk of life and is a huge problem in our country.

### SUPPORT FOR POSITION

The country, as a whole, needs to provide innovative non addictive methods of pain management as well as support treatment and rehabilitation programs helping already struggling patients with addiction. A ground floor solution is needed to provide support to those already affected by the initial problem. The American Medical Association (AMA) created a task force with several goals to tackle this problem ("Reversing the Opioid", 2019). The focus of the task force is physician leadership when it comes to managing the problem. With that the AMA (2019) hopes to:

- Register and use state prescription drug monitoring programs
- enhance education and training
- support comprehensive treatment for pain and substance use disorders
- help end stigma
- co-prescribe naloxone to patients at risk of overdose
- encourage safe storage and disposal of opioids and all medications. ("Reversing the Opioid", 2019).

An important part of this plan for change is to reduce the number of patients who need care compared to the number who are receiving care. In doing this the AMA strive to end the stigma of addiction, a disease largely misunderstood and judged by the general public.



Home. (2018).

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In Nursing practice Nurses have an important role in pain management along with educating those with this issue.

As health care professionals, nurses can educate the general public on addiction and help specific populations better understand how it occurs, how to prevent it, and if necessary, the treatment process associated with it.

The AMA (2019) wants nurses to use their "exponential knowledge to inform the public to prevent further cases" and advocate for patients who need care but are not receiving it (nursing world). The American Nurses Association has kept nurses as the main focus when writing legislation. Nurses are considered "high priority advocates" within society. According to Opioid Epidemic (2020) nurses educate patients about the following:

- Acupuncture
- Aromatherapy
- Chiropractic manipulation
- Guided imagery
- Herbs and dietary supplements
- Nutritional support
- Massage therapy
- Hypnosis
- Reduce stigma related to addiction
- Muscle manipulation
- Various movement therapies like yoga (para. 6).

Along with these specific alternative medicine approaches there are also other approaches a nurse can take to educate a patient on alternative interventions to pain management.

### CONCLUSION

The opioid epidemic is a problem largely created by health care professionals. It is now the health care professionals' job to find a way to alleviate and hopefully end this crisis. Addiction is a very complex and very complicated disease that follows many people for their entire life also affecting everyone around them. Rehabilitation for patients with addiction needs to be more available for those in need and more innovative in the care for patients. There also needs to be more education to patients about alternative methods of pain relief. There is a way to innovate out of the opioid epidemic which include the following : alternative therapy, accessible rehabilitation centers with more proactive and aggressive treatment, and continued education to the general public about addiction to reduce stigma and judgement.

### REFERENCES

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