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#### Recommended Citation

Randazzo, Julia, "The Opioid Epidemic and Nursing: How Can We Help?" (2021). *Student Research Poster Presentations 2021*. 68.

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# The Opioid Epidemic and Nursing: How Can We Help?

Julia Randazzo

## INTRODUCTION

- Opioids are a class of natural, synthetic, or semi-synthetic drugs that are used to reduce pain.
- Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) is a problematic pattern in opioid use that causes significant impairment or distress within a user's daily life.
- The opioid epidemic has led to excessive financial burdens on federal, state, and local governments, private health insurances, and society at large.
- The National Academy of Medicine's Action Collaborative on Countering the U.S. Opioid Epidemic along with the ACCN and 55 federal and private organizations have engaged in partnerships to develop solutions to the opioid crisis.

## SIGNIFICANCE

- Nearly 841,000 have died from opioid overdose since 1999.
- In 2019, over 70% of drug overdose deaths involved an opioid.
- The number of drug overdose deaths increased almost 5% from 2018-2019 and has quadrupled since 1999.
- From 2018 to 2019, the rates of overdose deaths from synthetic drugs, like fentanyl, increased over 16%.
- In 2017, the U.S. declared a national emergency due to the opioid epidemic.
- In 2017, more than 2.1 million people over the age of 12 had an opioid use disorder.
- Fatal opioid overdoses and OUD cost the U.S. \$1.02 trillion in 2017.

## POSITION STATEMENT

- There is a way to combat the opioid epidemic as a healthcare system.
- Nurses play an essential part in solving the opioid epidemic because they are involved in all aspects of the community.

## SUPPORT FOR POSITION

- In 2017, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services created a 5-point strategy to combat the opioid epidemic.
- This 5-point strategy included better addiction prevention, treatment and recovery services; better data on opioid use and abuse, alternative forms of pain management, better targeting of overdose reversing drugs, and more research on opioid addiction.
- Nurses represent the largest number of healthcare providers, have the greatest interaction with patients and families, and deliver comprehensive, and cost-effective care.
- Nurses in primary care, community health, and schools are key advocates in protecting and educating the public on a wide array of conditions and diseases, including substance abuse.
- Nurse educators in the community serve as valuable resources in the prevention of drug abuse.
- Nurses within the community can also educate teachers, coaches, and students on prevention and identification of risk and people facing this disease.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- The ANA has recently called for increase utilization of prescription drug monitoring programs and increased availability of naloxone to first responders, family, friends, and caregivers of individuals with OUD.
- The American Society of Addiction Medicine addressed the need for decreased stigma towards individuals with OUD and treating these individuals using best scientific evidence and the most humanistic approach to overcome this disease.
- Today, nurses should be receiving education on OUD risk factors, etiology, psychosocial aspects, and modalities of treatment.
- Nurses should look at OUD as a chronic condition with exacerbations, remission, and recovery.
- By decreasing the stigma of OUD through education, healthcare providers can positively impact treatment and recovery while decreasing the chances of relapse.
- Survival rates are improved when patients remain in treatment longer with increased levels of employment and overall improved quality of life.
- Early detection and identification must be available to individuals at risk across all subgroups, ages, and in all types of healthcare settings.
- Nurses within the community need to educate individuals on the risks associated with substance abuse in order to prevent this abuse from occurring.

## CONCLUSION

- Nurses play an important role in the primary, secondary, and tertiary care of those at risk or suffering for OUD.
- By providing the education and necessary tools it is possible to decrease the rates of opioid related deaths and OUD.
- In conclusion, in order to decrease the stigma, healthcare workers need to be educated in order to decrease stigma and provide better treatment, which can decrease the chance of relapse and overdose.



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