The Opioid Epidemic: A Call to Action

Deaths from prescription opioids—drugs like oxycodone, hydrocodone, and methadone—have more than quadrupled since 1999. Opioid prescribing continues to fuel the epidemic. Today, nearly half of all U.S. opioid overdose deaths involve a prescription opioid. In 2015, more than 15,000 people died from overdoses involving prescription opioids. More people die of overdose than car accidents each day in America.

Most Commonly Overdosed Opioid

The most common drugs involved in prescription opioid overdose deaths include:

- Methadone
- Oxycodone (such as OxyContin®)
- Hydrocodone (such as Vicodin®)

Overdose Deaths

Among those who died from prescription opioid overdose between 1999 and 2014:

- Overdose rates were highest among people aged 25 to 54 years.
- Overdose rates were higher among non-Hispanic whites and American Indian or Alaskan Natives, compared to non-Hispanic blacks and Hispanics.
- Men were more likely to die from overdose, but the mortality gap between men and women is closing.
- (Center for Disease Control, 2016)

What the American Medical Association Promotes

- We should register for and use our state's prescription drug monitoring program.
- We may need to enhance our education and training about safe prescribing.
- We should co-prescribe naloxone to patients at risk of overdose.
- We should get training to provide medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for substance use disorders.
- We need to speak out against stigma and stand up for what we know is right.
  (Stack, 2016)

What the American Nurses Association Promotes

- Require prescriber education both in treating of opioid overdose as well as alternatives to opioids for pain management.
- Increase effective provider use of prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs) and across state border collaboration.
- Regulate pain management clinics.
• Remove barriers that limit non-physician providers from providing medication assisted treatment (MAT) and grant the ability to prescribe buprenorphine.
• Expand drug take back programs.
• Fund support treatment and education/prevention measures.
• Create pretrial diversion options, including drug courts that help those with substance abuse issues get treatment in lieu of incarceration, along with lower penalties.

(American Nurses Association, 2016)

References


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