

## **AMA Section of Chronic Pain**

### **Position Statement: The Opioid Crisis**

Much has been written about the opioid crisis in the popular media and scientific journals. While it is clear that there has been an increase in opioid related deaths in North America over the last decade, it is less clear that this represents an epidemic. In fact, the actual numbers of opioid related deaths in North America are small in comparison to other more common causes of death including cancer, heart disease and infectious diseases.

While we acknowledge that opioid related deaths are at times related to iatrogenic causes from prescribing practices, the issues around opioid diversion and misuse are far more complex than simply laying the blame at the feet of physicians. In fact, in one study, 70% of opioids diverted to the street were obtained illicitly from valid patients and clearly without the consent of the prescribing physician.

The AMA Section of Chronic Pain supports the ongoing use of opioids for the management of patients with chronic pain. However, with the following caveats:

- 1) Opioids should be prescribed responsibly and in keeping with current standards of practice including the Canadian Opioid Guidelines.
- 2) Caution should be taken when prescribing large amounts of short acting opioids or daily doses above 200 mg of morphine equivalents.
- 3) Opioids should never be used alone in the management of chronic non cancer pain. Rather they should be part of a comprehensive and multimodal approach that includes patient self management, active rehabilitation and interventional therapies.
- 4) Further research needs to be urgently taken to better understand the factors leading to accidental opioid related deaths.
- 5) We strongly urge that provincial and national governments work towards better monitoring of drug utilization and misuse in Canada.
- 6) Opioids should be used with caution in patients taking other sedative agents including benzodiazepines.
- 7) We encourage physicians to review drug monitoring data such as PIN prior to the prescribing of opioids for chronic non cancer pain.

- 8) We recognize the need for better access to treatment programs for patients who are diagnosed with an addiction.

The AMA Section of Chronic Pain believes that responsible opioid prescribing is the fundamental solution to the current opioid problem. Overly restrictive policies regarding opioid prescribing has the potential of creating as much harm as overly liberal prescribing of opioids in chronic pain in terms of patient suffering and death.

We support ongoing education of health care providers in their use of opioids and in their management of patients with chronic non cancer pain.

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