

Stepping Up the Fight in the Opioid Crisis

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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They are sobering statistics:

91 people a day die from opioid overdoses

In 2016, there were 64,000 overdose deaths nationwide (up 11,000 from the year before) - 13,200 were due to heroin use. That's more deaths than those caused by motor vehicle accidents or guns.

In 2016, there was \$8.6 billion in opioid sales, with 232,000,000 prescriptions written – more than double the number of opiate prescriptions written 25 years earlier.

The United States has 5% of the world's population, but consumed 99.7% of world's supply of hydrocodone and 99% of the world's oxycodone supply in 2015.

Dr. George Hevesy (Hev-ah-see), an emergency medicine physician, says we have a generation that is very drug dependent, and until we change our attitudes and accept that there's other mechanisms to control pain, we will not make a dent in those numbers.

SOT DR. GEORGE HEVESY – EMERGENCY MEDICINE PHYSICIAN, OSF HEALTHCARE

(The use of opioids has not happened overnight, it has happened over the last 20 years. 15 years ago in medicine were taught that pain was the fifth vital sign and that no one should have pain. Now with all the deaths and the use of heroin because people can't afford prescription meds and it's so readily available it has finally brought it to attention that we have a crisis. :31)

V/O: President Trump officially declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency in late October. In the wake of that, a White House panel is calling for more drug courts, greater training for doctors and penalties for insurers who do not cover addiction treatment, but did not ask for additional money to help combat the nation's drug problem.

Dr. Hevesy says the declaration is a good start, but hopes it's not too little too late. As a physician who works in an emergency room, he's seen plenty of overdoses and feels the medical community is doing a better job with prescribing opiates for pain. There is additional monitor of physicians that takes place so they know who wrote how many prescriptions for how many pills. He says there is a need for people to have pain medication – such as those with terminal conditions, chronic pain, or for post-surgical care - but doctors are using other medications that are not as addictive for pain control.

SOT DR. GEORGE HEVESY – EMERGENCY MEDICINE PHYSICIAN, OSF HEALTHCARE

(We've changed our attitude towards prescribing, the monitoring is helping. I think we need more treatment centers we need more social workers to help with this. We need access. We're not very judgmental now in medicine we're here to help. But the number dollars that will take to get this straightened out... this will take not one year, this will be a continuous battle for years to come. :28)

V/O:

One of the biggest issues Dr. Hevesy and others are seeing is people turning to street drugs such as heroin – originally synthesized from morphine - because it's cheaper to buy and is readily available. The problem is some of the heroin is being mixed with Fentanyl or its stronger version, Carfentanil – used on elephants - which is 100 times more potent than Fentanyl, and 10,000 times more potent than morphine, and can easily kill someone.

A person who ODs can be treated with Narcan or naloxone if found in time. Dr. Hevesy says sometimes they have to give five or six doses to wake a person who has overdosed because of what they have taken. And while it saves lives, Narcan does not remedy the problem. Statistics show if a person ODs on an opiate and is reversed by Narcan, 1 in 10 will die within 12 months from another overdose.

It's an issue that cuts across all ethnic and socio-economic lines.

SOT DR. GEORGE HEVESY – EMERGENCY MEDICINE PHYSICIAN, OSF HEALTHCARE

(You can't put your head in the sand and says this will not affect me. Be aware what's going on with your children, who they're hanging out with. Look at your medications in you drug boxes at home and in the bathrooms. Just be vigilant :17)