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ECOSOC 4– Commission of Narcotic Drugs (CND)

Research Report

Topic 1: The mitigation of the widespread recreational use of and addiction to
prescription opioids



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Introduction

The topic this committee will be discussing is the widespread recreational use of and addiction to prescription opioids as well as measures that can or have been taken to reduce the severity of this issue. In the last 15 years, Emergency room visits and deaths related to opioid overdose have more than quadrupled and continues to rise. Studies by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that about half of all opioid overdose deaths involve a prescription opioid.

Opioids are used medically to treat conditions such as severe pain (often after surgery), acute pain, some forms of severe chronic pain, cough and diarrhea. This is due to their ability to dull a person's perception of pain, when they bind to opioid receptors in the brain and the body. However, opioids can also make a person feel euphoric, as it affects the brain's reward system. Therefore, many people abuse prescription opioids, which tend to lead to an outcome of addiction.

Definition of key terms

mitigation-The action of reducing the severity or seriousness of something. ¹

prescription opioids- Prescription opioids are medications that are chemically similar to *endorphins* – opioids that our body produces naturally to relieve pain – and also similar to the class A drug heroin. In nature, opioids are found in the seed pod of the opium poppy plant. Opioid medications can be natural (made from the plant), semi-synthetic (modified in a lab from the plant), and fully synthetic (completely fabricated in a laboratory). ²

addiction- The fact or condition of being addicted. The compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance (such as heroin, nicotine, or alcohol).

drug abuse- Addiction to drugs, substance abuse involving drugs.

Background Information

The addiction of prescribed opioids has been an issue for many years. Opioids have been around for many centuries and continue to be used in society today for pain relief, although modern scientists now recognize the potential of them leading to addiction and abuse. Evidence shows that opium was used in the ancient Sumerian civilization, which leads back to 5,000 years ago. While some of the evidence proves to be for recreational use, its primary use was linked to religion. This was an importance in the spiritual realm, as pain had deep roots in the religion. The ingestion and inhalation of opium would produce an unexplainable feeling of euphoria. It was also used medically by the Ancient Egyptians, for things such as calming crying children and euthanasia. ³

In China, opium use became very popular in the 17th century, when smoking tobacco had been made illegal. Quickly, Opium dens started to appear across all of China. These dens were places where people could come to buy and smoke the drug. They later started appearing in other countries as well. Opium first became illegal when Emperor Jiaqing decided to outlaw the import of opium in 1799. However, England had established a trade with the Chinese people, trading them opium from India, and in return gaining Chinese luxurious goods, such as porcelain, silk, and tea, which were in

¹ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mitigation>

² <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/what-opioid>

³ <http://www.yalescientific.org/2017/01/ancient-analgesics-a-brief-history-of-opioids/>

great demand in China. The Qing dynasty was not pleased with the ongoing trade and therefore led to the first and second Opium Wars in the 19th century. It was not until 1906, that the Qing government were able to control the import of opium, thus almost completely stopping the trade of opium by 1917. Opium smoking and addiction still remained an issue until 1949, when the communists came to power.⁴

In the 19th century, the invention of the syringe enabled doctors to use opiates in surgery and in general pain management, but it wasn't until the 20th century, that opioid medication became a significant interest to the people. Due to the two world wars, modern warfare had left many with injuries and chronic pain. Soon there was a rise in demand for medicine to help with the pain, leading to a rise in pain relief medication on the market. Most of these pain relief medicines would soon be identified as opioids. This led to many becoming addicted to the medication and a rise in abuse.⁵

In the late 19th century, around two-thirds of those addicted to opioids were middle- and upper-class women, which was due to the widespread of doctors prescribing opioids to help relieve women from menstrual and menopausal discomfort. However, as the years progressed and more knowledge on opioids was discovered, doctors became more cautious when prescribing opioids to patients.⁶

Throughout the years, opioid medications have been outlawed. In 1899, scientists had produced a new cough suppressant, which they claimed was non-addictive. Advertisements would write that this new cough suppressant, known as heroin, was "superior in all respects" compared to other opioids, such as morphine and codeine, leading to the person being completely free from any dependence on the drug. However, these claims were soon proven false, leading to the decision of making heroin illegal and no longer available as an over-the-counter medicine. Although, some of these opioids such as heroin have become illegal or harder to get prescribed by a doctor, it remains a huge issue in many countries.⁷

Nowadays, people misuse prescribed opioids by taking them in ways that are not intended. These ways include:⁸

- Taking another person's prescribed medication
- Using the opioid medication in a way that is different from what the label or the doctor has intended. This is often done by taking more than the prescribed dosage or more frequently than you are allowed to take. It is also done by crushing the pills into powder to snort or inject the drug.
- Taking the opioid prescription to get high
- Mixing the opioid medications with certain drugs such as alcohol etc.

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/opium-trade>

⁵ <http://www.yalescientific.org/2017/01/ancient-analgesics-a-brief-history-of-opioids/>

⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64157/>

⁷ <http://www.yalescientific.org/2017/01/ancient-analgesics-a-brief-history-of-opioids/>

⁸ <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/prescription-pain-medications-opioids>

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

The CDC is an organization that has been studying overdoses due to prescription opioids and have provided people with figures, to show how serious, the situation is and that there must be taken action to solve this ongoing issue.⁹

The United States of America suffers from many drug overdoses every year, 6 out of 10 of them involving opioids. This results in about 91 deaths per day due to opioid overdoses, most of them from prescribed opioids.¹⁰ This issue has become worse throughout the years in the United States of America, as deaths due to prescribed opioids have quadrupled.¹¹ Therefore, the United States of America is one of the countries that suffer the most from this issue.

Another country that suffers immensely from overdoses due to opioids, is the United Kingdom. Although the situation has not reached the severity that the United States of America has reached, it continues to rise every year. The number of prescribed opioids have doubled in the last ten years, from 12 million in 2000 to 24 million in 2016.¹² According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, the United Kingdom accounted for 31 percent of Europe's 8,441 overdose deaths in 2015.¹³

Relevant UN resolutions

Resolution 57/10

Preventing the diversion of ketamine from legal sources while ensuring its availability for medical use.

Resolution 56/8

Promoting initiatives for the safe, secure and appropriate return for disposal of prescription drugs, in particular those containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances under international control.

Resolution 55/7

Promoting measures to prevent drug overdose, in particular opioid overdose.

Resolution 54/6

Promoting adequate availability of internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion and abuse.¹⁴

⁹ <http://annals.org/aim/fullarticle/1788221/prescription-drug-abuse-executive-summary-policy-position-paper-from-american>

¹⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>

¹¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>

¹² <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/10/17/prescription-opioid-abuse-rising-in-uk.html>

¹³ <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/10/17/prescription-opioid-abuse-rising-in-uk.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/>

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

There have been several attempts to solve this issue. Researchers have developed medications that can be taken to help addicts to recover from their addiction. ¹⁵Methadone and buprenorphine are both medications created to help with addiction, by activating the opioid receptors just a bit, preventing the person from feeling withdrawal symptoms or cravings, yet not enough for the person to feel euphoric. ¹⁶With this medication, addicts can prevent relapses from occurring, while their brain gradually recovers. Another medication that has been developed is Naltrexone. This medication blocks the opioid receptors, therefore preventing the opioids from giving the usual effects, such as euphoria. ¹⁷

As overdoses, is one of the main issues with prescription opioids, measures have also been taken to try and reduce the amount of deaths caused by opioid overdoses. Therefore, they have created a medication, known as naloxone, which can be used in emergencies to prevent a person from dying of an overdose, since the medication blocks the opioid receptors. ¹⁸ However, the medication needs to be given very quickly and therefore may not work in all cases, if given too late. Therefore, The Food and Drug Administration has recently approved an easy-to-use nasal spray version that can be given by a friend or family member. ¹⁹

Possible Solutions

- An increase in research and funding to long-term opioid-addiction treatment programs could help mitigate the rehab process for the addicted, and help making more opioid-addicts take part in these treatment programs.
- A widespread ban of opioids in the medicinal sector could starve the market of prescription-opioids, which could make it harder for recreational users to acquire the illegal substances. Medicinal substitutes must then be found.
- Campaigns in hospitals, waiting rooms and schools, as well as ads informing people on the effects of an opioid addiction and how severe the issue can be, using figures from research and data to support the arguments presented. This will provide more recognition to the ongoing issue.
- The decrease in a supply of opioid drugs, resulting in a decrease of the amount of opioids a doctor can prescribe to patients.
- Raising awareness, including among healthcare professionals, such as the prescribers who write the prescriptions and pharmacy staff who dispense the medicines.

¹⁵ <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/what-opioid>

¹⁶ <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/what-opioid>

¹⁷ <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/what-opioid>

¹⁸ <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/what-opioid>

¹⁹ <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/what-opioid>

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