

# Speaking Out in Your Community

## Authoring an article on opioid dependence

In addition to paid advertising, another strategy to help raise awareness of your practice is to write and submit an original short article to your local newspaper or town magazine that discusses opioid dependence.

Compelling facts about prevalence, disease state, and treatment—as well as the published references that support them—are supplied on the following pages. Consider these facts "building blocks" you can use when crafting your story.

## Key Facts: Prevalence

- From 1992 to 2003, misuse of opioid prescription painkillers increased by 140%<sup>1</sup>
- Americans, who represent less than 5% of the world's population, are by far the largest group of opioid users; 80% of the world's supply of opioids (and 99% of the hydrocodone available globally) are used by people in the United States<sup>2</sup>
- The increase in the legitimate use of opioids has been paralleled by a rise in abuse of these drugs, with a 63% increase in opioid deaths during the 5-year period from 1999 to 2004<sup>3</sup>
- Multiple investigations have shown prevalence of drug abuse around 20% and as high as 58% in patients receiving opioids for chronic pain<sup>2</sup>
- According to the *2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*:
- Almost 2 million Americans are opioid dependent<sup>4</sup>
- Approximately 4.7 million teenagers and adults used opioid prescription painkillers for nonmedical purposes<sup>4</sup>
- Statistics for your state may be available at <https://nsduhweb.rti.org/>
- Approximately 32.7 million Americans report having used opioid prescription painkillers for nonmedical purposes at least once in their lives<sup>4</sup>
- Statistics for your state may be available at <https://nsduhweb.rti.org/>

## Key Facts: The Disease of Opioid Dependence

- Opioid dependence is recognized by the World Health Organization as a brain disease<sup>5</sup>
- Opioid dependence is a condition that involves the physical, psychological, and behavioral need for an opioid, and affects every aspect of a person's life
- The misuse of opioids can create euphoria of such intensity that it reinforces drug-taking behavior and resets the brain to believing that opioids are necessary to survive<sup>6,7</sup>
- Opioid prescription painkillers are chemically similar to heroin and can be as addictive
- Adults abusing opioids typically acquire them by one of the following methods: doctor shopping,

- Youths abusing opioids typically acquire them by: stealing them from parents or relatives, buying them from classmates who are selling legitimate prescriptions, or buying them from illegal Internet pharmacies or other vendors<sup>2</sup>
- When an opioid-dependent person stops taking opioids, severe physical withdrawal symptoms occur, and he/she often develops intense cravings for the drug. These cravings can be so powerful that people find it extremely difficult to stop taking opioids
- The social stigma attached to opioid dependence is so strong that some people will continue using opioids than risk possible exposure by seeking treatment<sup>8</sup>

## Key Facts: Treating Opioid Dependence

- Historically, the primary treatment option for patients with opioid dependence has been methadone, most often administered in a clinic setting
- Psychosocial counseling is a critical component of opioid-dependence treatment
- A new treatment option has been available since 2003, which can be prescribed by trained physicians in the privacy of an office setting
- Opioid dependence can now be managed medically—in the same way other chronic illnesses like diabetes and hypertension are managed<sup>9</sup>
- Many individuals are more inclined to be treated in the privacy and convenience of a physician's office
- According to several conservative estimates, every dollar invested in opioid-dependence treatment may yield a return of between \$4 and \$7 in reduced drug-related crime, criminal justice costs, and theft alone. When savings related to health care costs are included, the ratio can equal 12:1 for every dollar invested<sup>5</sup>

## Tone-Setting Headlines

Sometimes the greatest challenge in writing an article is generating a compelling headline. Here are a few suggestions to start your thought process.

**Opioid Dependence: The Silent Epidemic**

**Is It Pain or Opioid Dependence?**

**Opioid Dependence Affects Our Community**

**Opioid Prescription Painkiller Abuse Is More Common Than You Think**

## References:

1. National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University. *Under the Counter: The Diversion and Abuse of Controlled Prescription Drugs in the U.S.* New York, NY: National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University; July 2005.

2. Manchikanti L. National Drug Control Policy and prescription drug abuse: facts and fallacies. *Pain Physician*. 2007;10:399-424.

3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Unintentional poisoning deaths—United States, 1999-2004. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2007;56:93-96.
4. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). *Results From the 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*. Rockville, Md: Department of Health and Human Services, SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies; 2006. NSDUH Series H-30, DHHS Publication SMA 06-4194.
5. World Health Organization, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. Position paper: substitution maintenance therapy in the management of opioid dependence and HIV/AIDS prevention. Available at: [www.who.int/substance\\_abuse](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse). Accessed July 12, 2006.
6. Tomkins DM, Sellers EM. Addiction and the brain: the role of neurotransmitters in the cause and treatment of drug dependence. *CMAJ.* 2001;164:817-821.
7. Camí J, Farré M. Mechanisms of disease: drug addiction. *N Engl J Med.* 2003;349:975-986.
8. Ellen EF. Methadone proponents urge office-based treatment. *Psych Times.* January 2001. Available at: [www.medicineandbehavior.com/mb990801b.html](http://www.medicineandbehavior.com/mb990801b.html). Accessed August 16, 2004.
9. Hanson GR. Drug addiction is a brain disease, and it still matters. *Addict Professional.* 2003;1:12-16.