Patterns of Opioid Use, Misuse, and Abuse in the U.S. Population, the VA Population, and the Military

Mark Edlund, MD, PhD
Research Triangle Institute
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Photo courtesy of The Herb Museum, Vancouver, BC
Acknowledgements

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• No conflicts of interest
Collaborators

• Mark Sullivan, MD, PhD, University of Washington
• Brad Martin, PharmD, PhD, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
• Andrea DeVries, PhD
Wellpoint
• Teresa Hudson, PharmD, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
“Among the remedies which it has pleased Almighty God to give to man to relieve his sufferings, none is so universal and so efficacious as opium.” Sydenham, 1682
Key Points

• Opioid use for Chronic Non-Cancer Pain (CNCP) is a two-edged sword
  – Pain relief
  – Addiction, overdose, increased health costs
• Opioid use for CNCP is increasing rapidly
• Often those receiving opioids for CNCP are those most likely to abuse them
Key Points continued

- Use of opioids is heavily concentrated
- Once on Chronic Opioid Therapy (COT), most patients remain on COT for years.
Major Caveat

• Will not be presenting data on COT benefits or appropriateness
Background On Prescribed Opioids

- 20% of general population significantly affected by CNCP.
- 40% to 50% of OEF/OIF Veterans significantly affected by CNCP.¹, ²-³
- Although combat injuries are common, musculoskeletal issues unrelated to combat trauma (e.g., back pain) are the most common causes of pain in military personnel.⁴

Following successful cancer pain initiatives, efforts have been made to liberalize the use of opioids for the treatment of these individuals.

These efforts are based on the belief that patients with CNCP deserve pain relief as much as those with cancer and that sustained pain relief is possible with stable doses of opioids.
Background (continued)

Opioid prescribing has been rapidly increasing in the past twenty years
By 2010, enough opioid pain relievers were sold to medicate every American adult with a typical dose of 5 mg of hydrocodone every 4 hours for 1 month.
While some see the growth in opioid prescribing as evidence of better attention to the problem of unrelieved pain,⁠¹ others have expressed concern that we have not had adequate trials to prove the “safety and effectiveness of long-term opioid therapy.” ⁠²

Clinical Trials Evaluating Opioids for CNCP

- Lack of long-term studies
- Often excluded individuals with serious physical health disorders, other comorbid pain conditions, or mental health and substance use disorders.
U.S. Opioid Rates, 1999–2010

CDC. MMWR 2011. http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm60e1101a1.htm?s_cid=mm60e1101a1_w.
The number of poisoning deaths and the percentage of these deaths involving opioid analgesics increased each year from 1999 through 2006.

Figure 1. Poisoning deaths involving opioid analgesics, other drugs, and no drugs: United States, 1999–2006

NOTE: Access data table for Figure 1 at ftp://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Health_Statistics/NCHS/Publications/Data_Briefs/db022/fig01.xls.
Drug Overdose Death Rate 2008, and Opioid Pain Reliever Sales Rate 2010

What is Causing These Deaths?

- Diversion (patient had no opioid prescription)
- Doctor shopping (several prescribers per patient)
- Use of inherently risky medications
Diversion and Doctor Shopping

- 295 opioid deaths in 2006 in WV
- 67% men, 92% age 18-54
- Diversion in 63% (no Rx)
- Doctor shopping in 21% (≥5 prescribers)
- Predominantly diversion in men and doctor shopping in women

Hall AJ, JAMA. 2008
Inherently Risky Medications

– 9940 persons with ≥3 opioid Rx in 90 days
– 51 opioid overdoses, with 6 deaths
– annual overdose rates by prescribed dose:
  • 0.2% for 1-20mg MED per day
  • 0.7% for 50-99mg MED per day
  • 1.8% for ≥ 100mg MED per day (9x increase)

Dunn KM, Ann Intern Med. 2010
Addictive Potential

• The addictive potential of opioids remains a concern.\textsuperscript{1-3}

1. SAMHSA 2000.
Prescription Opioid Abuse Increasing

• National Survey on Drug Use and Health
  – Nationally rep. sample of 67,000 >12 yo, 2002-5
  – 5% “non-medical” use Rx opioids in past 12 mo
    (mostly hydrocodone and oxycodone)
  – More new initiators in 2006 than any other drug
    (even marijuana)
  – 56% misusers obtained from friends or family

• Monitoring the Future Study
  – 9% of 12th graders misused opioids 2002-2007

• Drug Abuse Warning Network
  – Opioids involved in 33% of drug-related ED visits
Risk Factors for Opioid Abuse Among Users of Opioids for CNCP

Prescribing guidelines stress substance abuse as a risk factor, while recognizing that other factors remain to be identified\(^1\)-\(^7\)

4. Veterans Health Administration, Department of Defense. 2003.
TROUP Study: Trends and Risks of Opioid Use for Pain

- 2000-2005 claims data from HealthCore and Arkansas Medicaid insurance plans
- Follow patients with tracer CNCP diagnoses:
  - Arthritis/joint pain
  - Back pain
  - Neck pain
  - Headaches/migraines
  - HIV/AIDS

TROUP study, supported by NIDA grant, DA 022560
• Trends in Opioid Use in the TROUP Study
# HealthCore percent change in chronic opioid use 2000-2005

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<th>Group</th>
<th>% with $\geq$90d opioids in 2000</th>
<th>Estimated % change 2000-5</th>
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<td>Group</td>
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Average daily dose in mg morphine equivalents for patients with NCPC and non-zero opioid use.

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Days supplied of opioids in a calendar year for patients with NCPC and non-zero opioid use

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Total opioid dose for calendar year in mg morphine equivalents for patients with NCPC and non-zero opioid use.

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Percentage of total population opioid use: total dose

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<td>0.5%</td>
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<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
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<td>0.8%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
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<td>1.5%</td>
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<td>37.3%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
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</table>
Concentration of opioid use among patients with CNCP

- Yearly total opioid use was highly concentrated in both HC and AR samples
- In HealthCore, 5% of the CNCP patients used 70% of total opioids (in mg. MED)
- In Arkansas, 5% of the CNCP patients used 48% of total opioids (in mg. MED)
- No other prescribed medication shows this degree of concentration among users

Edlund MJ, *Pain Symp Mgmt*, 2010
Which Individuals are Most Likely to Receive Opioids?

- Those with greater number of pain diagnoses
- Those with mental health and substance abuse disorders
Chronic opioid use (>90d/yr) in pts with MH and SUD diagnoses

![Bar chart showing chronic opioid use over time and across different populations.](chart.png)
Among individuals with COT, which are most likely to develop abuse?

- Younger individuals
- Those with MH and SUD disorders
"Adverse Selection"

Those individuals who are most likely to receive COT are also those who are most likely to develop opioid abuse/dependence.
Why does adverse selection occur?

- Providers want to help patients in pain and have few tools other than Rx pad.
- Patients with MH and SA disorders and multiple pain problems are more distressed (pain and psychol symptoms) and more persistent in demanding opioid initiation and dose increases.
- Providers use opioid prescriptions as a “ticket out of the exam room.”
COT discontinuation

• Once started on a course of COT, how long do patients remain on opioids?
• TROUP study of COT recipients (used at least 90 days without a 32 day gap)
• Outcome: 6 months without any opioid Rx
Kaplan-Meier Plot

Health Plans

Time to Opioid Discontinuation

Arkansas Health Core

Health Plans

Probability of Opioid Continuation

0 500 1000 1500 2000
Opioid Use in Military

- Misuse increased ten-fold 2002 to 2008, from 1% to 10%\(^1,2\)
- This represents 133,000 active duty personnel.
- Chronic pain is prevalent in service members who have survived catastrophic injury
- Chronic pain frequently comorbid with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI),\(^15\) the signature wounds of OEF/OIF.\(^16-18\)
- In a survey of VA patients 13% reported opioid misuse

2. Bray RM, in press
Conclusions

• Opioid use for CNCP is a two-edged sword
• Opioid use for CNCP increasing rapidly—but will we soon reach a “Tipping Point”? 
• Often those receiving opioids for CNCP are those most likely to abuse them
• Use of opioids is heavily concentrated
More Conclusions

• Once on Chronic Opioid Therapy (COT), most patients remain on COT for years.
• Most importantly, these are complex patients, usually requiring multi-modality treatment. Don’t give up!