

Drug Misuse in America 2019: Physician Perspectives and Diagnostic Insights on the Evolving Drug Crisis

Background

- In 2018, drug overdose deaths in the United States decreased compared to 2017,¹ but deaths from synthetic opioids (except methadone) and deaths involving stimulants increased.¹
- Primary care physicians (PCPs) represent the largest prescribers of controlled substances, but they often lack the knowledge or time to identify substance use disorders and employ comprehensive risk management strategies.
- Assessing PCP knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about drug misuse may help explain prescribing behaviors and safety practices related to controlled substances. Assessing drug misuse rates could provide complementary insight into drug misuse.
- **Objective:** The investigators of this study surveyed PCPs to assess current pain management practice trends in the United States; they also analyzed data from clinical drug monitoring tests to assess nationwide drug misuse.

Methods

- A survey on drug misuse and the current challenges of treating chronic pain was distributed to PCPs in the United States.
 - The answers to survey questions were evaluated for trends in pain management practice.
- De-identified data of >4.4 million clinical drug monitoring tests were analyzed for drug misuse. Data were from the Quest Diagnostics database for the years 2011 through 2018.

Results

- All geographic regions were represented by the 500 PCPs who participated in the survey.
- Most surveyed PCPs (83%) agreed that treating patients for chronic pain is more difficult because of the opioid crisis.
 - Many PCPs (62%) expressed concern that the current opioid crisis may be replaced by another prescription drug crisis.
 - Most PCPs (81%) reported they were reluctant to administer care to new patients who were currently prescribed opioids.
- Most PCPs (88%) reported that prescription drug monitoring is critical to help identify patients who may be misusing prescription drugs.
- Most PCPs (78%) reported that to avoid prescribing opioids, they instead often prescribe gabapentin to treat patients for chronic pain.
- Based on clinical drug monitoring tests, misuse of nonprescribed gabapentin increased by 40% from 2017 to 2018.

Conclusions

- PCPs reported challenges to delivering care to patients suffering from chronic pain.
- They also think prescription drug monitoring will play an important role in addressing drug misuse.

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Webpage

http://annualmeeting.painmed.org/uploads/2020/aapm2020_posters_web.pdf

References

1. Hedegaard H, Miniño AM, Warner M. Drug overdose deaths in the United States, 1999–2018. NCHS Data Brief, no 356. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2020.

The full Health Trends™ Report can be accessed at www.questdiagnostics.com/dms/Documents/drug-prescription-misuse/Health_Trends_Report_2019.pdf