

# OPIATE ADDICTION

The Monster in Our Communities



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## Disclaimer

- Information contained herein is based on my experience, education, and training and does not reflect the opinions of nor is it endorsed by my employers or any other entity.
- This information is not to be considered "medical advice" but is instead intended to spark broader discussion leading to collaboration on finding of solutions.



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## What is an Opioid?

- "Opioids are a class of drugs that derive from or mimic natural substances found in the opium poppy plant. Opioids work in the brain to produce various effects, including pain relief.
- Includes prescription pain medicine and illegal drugs. Some people use opioids because of the euphoria ("high") they can produce. Opioid drugs can cause addiction, also known as opioid use disorder (OUD)."
- Common uses:
  - Post-surgical pain
  - Severe pain due to trauma or disease
  - Coughing
  - Diarrhea



<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/treatment-tests-and-therapies/opioids>

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## Common Opioids

- Prescription opioid drugs include:
  - Oxycodone
  - Oxymorphone
  - Hydrocodone
  - Hydromorphone
  - Fentanyl
  - Morphine
  - Codeine
  - Methadone
  - Tramadol
  - Buprenorphine
- **Heroin**, an illegal street drug, is also an opioid.



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## How Bad Is This?

- Since 1999
  - 932,000 deaths in the US from drugs (not all opioids)
  - In 2020 over 69,000 people were killed in the US by opioid overdose
  - NC Opioid Deaths increased by **40% in 1 year** between 2019 – 2020.
  - In 2020, 3304 people lost their life in NC due to opioid (**OVER 9 PEOPLE PER DAY**)



Sources: <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/data/index.html>  
 Source: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/news/press-releases/2022/03/21/north-carolina-reports-40-increase-overdose-deaths-2020-compared-2019-ncdhhs-continues-fight-against>

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## Its Personal

- Statistics are great information, but....
- Opiate addiction affects every person in the nation in some way.
  - The suffering of family or friends
  - Crime associated with illicit drugs
  - Negative impact on healthcare
    - Cost of services for everyone
    - Availability and efficiency of emergency services
    - Population-wide risk of disease transmission



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## How Did We Get Here?

- Compassionate Caregivers vs Criminals
    - Pharmaceutical Companies provide medications essential in reducing suffering.
    - Ethical healthcare providers who use narcotic medications in caring for patients in a well-intentioned way.
- Vs.
- Unethical companies working to sell as much of their product as possible without regard
  - Unethical healthcare providers recklessly providing narcotic pain medications.
  - Criminal drug distribution



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## How Did We Get Here?

### "Unintentional addiction"

- Patients who have been prescribed pain medication for ethical and appropriate relief of pain secondary to illness or injury.
  - Some develop dependency very quickly.
    - Prolonged use is associated with a significant risk of addiction.
    - Physical dependence and **addiction to opioids may occur in as little as a few days.**
    - As many as one in four people receiving prescription opioids long-term in a primary care setting develop addiction.



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## Why do some people become addicted while others don't?

"Family studies that include identical twins, fraternal twins, adoptees, and siblings suggest that as much as half of a person's risk of becoming addicted to nicotine, alcohol, or other drugs depends on his or her genetic makeup"



<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/genetics-epigenetics-addiction>

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## Hidden Dangers

- "Borrowing" pain medications
  - Taking prescription narcotics not prescribed to the patient.
  - Prescription ran out
  - Perhaps well-intentioned
  - Illegal – Felony
  - Serious problem for individuals subject to random drug screens



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## Victim vs. Villain

- Reframing the narrative
  - Dopehead
  - Tweaker
  - Any of dozens of label
- Labels aren't helpful unless communicating useful information in the appropriate medium.



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## "Tough Love"

- Be sure tough and love are administered in equal measure!
- Doesn't mean we have to dismiss elements of accountability and personal responsibility



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## What Can We Do?

- First
  - Remember a person suffering from addiction remains a person worthy of our kindness, love, empathy, and carefully orchestrated support.
  - Judge not!
    - Leave judgment to those responsible
  - Be cautious but compassionate



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## What Can We Do?

- Work Together
  - There are a lot of people and organizations trying to help make this situation better.
  - Collaboration is essential for any meaningful success to occur
    - Individuals
    - Faith-based organizations
    - Healthcare (Physicians, Hospitals, EMS, Treatment Centers)
    - Pharmaceutical industry.
    - Law Enforcement and Courts
    - Political figures (Local, State and Federal Government)



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## Be Ready

- To provide support
  - Direct support to those suffering from addiction.
  - Indirect support
    - To government and private organizations offering treatment and recovery services.
    - To healthcare personnel who are on the front lines treating the suffering and those harmed by the sufferers
    - To Law Enforcement Personnel who often face grave danger in their efforts to disrupt the flow of illegal drugs



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## Be Ready

- To have uncomfortable conversations and learn
  - Medication-Assisted Treatment Programs
  - Harm Reduction Programs
  - Needle Exchange Programs
  - Treatment facilities
  - Recovery facilities



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## Be Prepared

- For those who have the comfort and desire, being trained and prepared to intervene



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## Discarding Unused Medications

- Improper handling of unused narcotics or, any unused medication presents significant risks.
  - Discarding into trash
    - Will the medication make it to the landfill?
    - Will an addicted person find the discarded medication?
    - Will a child accidentally find the medication?

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## Discarding Unused Medications

- Flushing unused medications down the toilet.
  - The volume of unused medications results in significant contamination of water treatment systems and water supply.
    - Many medications are not captured by municipal water treatment processes

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Remembering  
Who They Are

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Remembering  
Who We Are



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Deciding Who  
We Want to be



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