Opiate Epidemic

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**Introduction**

It is an unfortunate reality that a whopping 130 people die after overdosing on opioids every day in the United States. There is no doubt in the fact that the use of opiate, inclusive of prescribed pain killer and synthetic drugs has been a cause of the great crisis in the US. These opioids do not only affect public health, but they also have a drastic impact on the economic and social welfare. In addition, a report was given by the Center of Diseases Control and Prevention that an estimated $78.5 billion worth of economic burden of this prescription is carried by America alone every year (Becker & James, 2016). The opiate misuse that is causing this economic burden is inclusive of healthcare cost, treatment of addiction, the loss of productivity and criminal justice involvement. This paper will shed light on the status of the opiate epidemic in the United States of America.

**Discussion**

As time is progressing, the opiate epidemic of the United States is not just restricted to addiction, it has become a significant cause behind many fatalities. Under one of the latest researches "Bleak New Estimate in Drug Epidemic" the issue has been highlighted as one of the greatest problems suffered by the general public nowadays. A highlight from the article was:

*“Drug overdoses killed about 72,000 Americans last year, a record number that reflects a rise of around 10 percent, according to new preliminary estimates from the Centers for Disease Control. The death toll is higher than the peak yearly death totals from H.I.V., car crashes or gun deaths* (Sanger-Katz, 2018)*.”*

This issue started back in the 1990s, it was reassured by the pharmaceutical companies that all the prescription drugs are safe to use and there are no side effects associated with the usage. As time passed on and more people started to use these drugs it was realized that all these opiates were indeed addictive and dangerous. This unawareness subsequently led to the extensive misuse and diversion of all these highly addictive medications. As time progressed, opiate overdose rates saw a great rise to the point that there was a significant fatality rate associated with these drugs. These unfortunate turn of events led to 47000 Americans losing their lives in 2017 due to the opiate overdose, which were inclusive of both heroin and prescription drugs (Hollingsworth, Ruhm & Simon, 2017). In the same year, around 1.7 million Americans underwent disorders of substance abuse inclusive of prescription pain killers as well as heroin.

The issue associated with opiate addiction is a major concern for the United States of America, as there is no proper control and regulation of this situation. The worse part here is that because of deaths that have been caused because of opiate abuse, the death toll has surpassed the mortality rate caused by health-related issues. One of the major contributions to the death rate has been caused by "black tar heroin" mixed with prescribed or synthetic opiates. There is one thing that needs to be made clear that the pharmaceutical companies are not responsible for the substitution and mixing of the drugs, the street peddlers are responsible for this problem (Macy, 2018). Having said that, there is no doubt in the fact that both street peddlers and the pharmaceutical industries have played a significant role in the distribution of opiates in the United States. However, physicians along with the pharmaceutical companies are the major culprits behind this disastrous situation as it was Purdue Pharma which initially introduced Oxycontin as a non-addictive painkiller (Murray, Stone, Pearson & Treisman, 2018). It was an utterly false advertisement as Oxycontin is one of the most addictive prescription drugs out there.

One of the most interesting parts about opiate abuse is that even media and television shows are trying to create awareness regarding highly addictive drugs while the authorities are not taking a significant stance on it. A new tv show "13 reasons why" has not just talked about the addiction associated with street drugs but also prescription of opiates. The characters of the show have talked about how even students of high school are prescribed Oxycontin regardless of the drugs highly addictive nature. Unfortunately, the overprescribing of opiates and aggressive marketing of synthetic drugs has put American lives in jeopardy (Quinones, 2015). Following recent opiate epidemic research, it was found out that drugs are killing white America. Studies show that the middle and upper class of the American population are the major target or victims of opiate addiction. The reason behind is the fact that their financial position is letting them afford the opiates.

One of the more significant drugs is a synthetic opiate called Fentanyl which is being consumed after mixing with black tar heroin, a complete recipe of disaster. Many people are using Fentanyl to satisfy their addiction, however, a huge chunk of people in the market are using it as a pain killer. Further, it feels like the involved parties and the pharmaceutical companies are deliberately trying to kill the general public as Fentanyl has become one of the most highly prescribed drugs regardless of its addictive nature (Daniels-Witt, Thompson, Glassman, Federman & Bott, 2017). The worst part is that there is no accountability when it comes to switching morphine with Fentanyl, knowing that it is a more potent and dangerous alternative. Additionally, if this was not enough, the street peddlers are making the situation worse by selling a combination of heroin and Fentanyl to the youth of America.

The research done by Sanger-Katz sheds light on the fact that Fentanyl and similar drugs have become an important part of the black market dealings (Sanger-Katz, 2018). In previous times, only heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and some benzodiazepines drugs were available and dealt in the black market. However, recently, the street drug dealers have become more profit-oriented and shifted their focus towards the production and dealing of Fentanyl. One of the main reasons for this shift in business is that Fentanyl can easily be manufactured in the laboratories, which is not the case with heroin as it can only be obtained from the poppy plants. The hope of the recovery for America lies with the anti-narcotic drug centers or treatment centers helping opioid addiction (Rocco, Manera & Bellio, 2017). The main focus of the government and the concerned authorities should be on banning the over-prescription of the opiate drugs. In some cases, it is not possible to ban the prescription altogether, so the physicians can lower the dosage of the drug. The government also needs to pass laws regarding the manufacturing and distribution of Fentanyl. This step will aid the general public and restrict the pharmaceutical industries, physicians and street peddlers from making money off the expense of the general public's health.

**Conclusion**

There is no doubt in the fact that opiate addiction is one of the most significant issues that is being faced by the United States in the 21st century. Numerous lives have been lost because of easy access to all these drugs and the number of victims is increasing by the day. The concerned authorities need to take a noteworthy step that will send a message to all the physicians, pharmaceutical industries and street peddlers out there. It is shocking enough that around 72000 Americans lost their lives in 2017 alone and the death rate is still constantly increasing. Further, let us not forget the fact that it is not just the people of America who are suffering because of this issue but the problem is widespread all across the globe. It is not a choice that was made by the victims, they were manipulated and made addicts because of the false advertisement, easy access and lack of awareness. There needs to be a ban on the prescription of all the synthetic drugs along with help given to the addicts by the treatment centers so they can recover and lead a healthy life again.

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