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Opioid Crisis in the United States

Opioids are described as the class of drugs that consists of an illegal drug named heroin. Synthetic opioids are the drugs that are legal and are used according to the physician's prescription. According to the clinical guidelines, opioids must be administered to patients that have chronic pain (McQuay 2229). Also, opioids must not be given to the patients that have back pain or migraines as the drug is highly addictive and result in severe consequences. However, overuse of the opioid is very common. Even, synthetic opioids can lead to addiction to the drug. It has been observed that using prescription opioids not only include addiction but dependence as well. Dependence is feeling withdrawal symptoms when not taking a specific drug. Opioid misuse and overdose is very common and is one of the major health crisis.

Specifically, discussing the U.S., the opioid epidemic began slowly in the late 1990s and increased significantly in recent years. According to the report published by the CDC, the first wave of opioids began in the 1990s while the second in 2010, with a rapid increase in overdose deaths especially by using the drug heroin. (*Opioid Data Analysis and Resources | Drug Overdose | CDC Injury Center*). The third wave began in 2013 with a significant increase in overdose deaths due to synthetic opioids. More than 68% of the deaths due to drug overdose involved synthetic opioids in 2017 which was alarming as synthetic opioids are legal in the market can be purchased easily. The National Institute of Drugs also reported that more than 140 people die every day after overdosing opioids in the U.S. (*Opioid Data Analysis and Resources | Drug Overdose | CDC Injury Center*). The misuse and overdosing of opioids is a national crisis as it not only affects public health but also the social and economic welfare of a country.

Before the present epidemic, opioids were generally prescribed as a short-term pain reliever especially to the patients after a surgery or to the patients that have advanced cancer or other terminal disorders. However, soon people began to overuse the drug that caused several cases of a drug overdose and addiction. The structure of the healthcare system of the US also played a crucial role as many doctors are in private practice and to gain financial benefits they prescribed opioids to ensure patient satisfaction level by providing over-prescription of pain relievers. Additionally, prescription opioids are cheap and therefore people can easily access it. This factor also played a vital role in overdose of the drug (Soelberg 1675).

Typically, when people continue overusing opioids whether to reduce pain or for inducing euphoric feelings, it can begin stages of an opioid addiction that can eventually lead to the dependence in which a person relies on drugs to prevent withdrawal symptoms. The increase in the usage of opioids is also because it is a relatively cheap alternative to physical therapies and other similar treatments.

Seeing the sudden increase in deaths due to overdosing opioids, in 2011, the former US president Barack Obama authorized millions of dollars of funding for researching opioids and its harmful effects. He also declared a “state of emergency” to combat the opioid epidemic. Also, recently President Donald Trump declared an opioid crisis as a “national emergency”. To further combat the crisis, the government put a ban on the block of shipments that carry opioids such as fentanyl (Soelberg 1675).

However, there is a need to educate people regarding the negative effects of opioids and how a drug overdose can lead to severe consequences. Although, several laws have been made to combat the opioid crisis such as the “Controlled Substances Act” and the “Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act”, yet the issue still exists in our society. Thus, it is necessary to revise old policies to combat the opioid crisis.

**Works Cited:**

McQuay, Henry. "Opioids in pain management." *The Lancet* 353.9171 (1999): 2229-2232.

*Opioid Data Analysis and Resources | Drug Overdose | CDC Injury Center*. 1 Nov. 2019, https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/analysis.html.

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