

New study shows half of all opiate prescriptions given to patients suffering from depression or anxiety

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Over half of all opiate prescriptions written annually in the United States are given to people diagnosed with anxiety or depression, according to a recently published study conducted by the University of Michigan and the Dartmouth-Hitchcock medical center. There are some 38.6 million Americans who have been diagnosed with anxiety, depression, or similar mood disorders. Amongst that number, 7.2 million have received prescriptions for opioids.

The study referenced government polling done in 2011 and 2013 in which patients described mental health issues and medication use. It found that adults who have been diagnosed with mental disorders are more likely to be prescribed opiate based pain medication (18.7 percent) vs those who have not (5 percent).

In total numbers, those adults who have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder account for 60 million of the 115 million opiate prescriptions written per year, or 51.4 percent.

In the US, the total number of opioid prescriptions quadrupled between 1999 and 2015. In that same period, 183,000 people died of overdoses. The study notes that in spite of the increased prescriptions, the amount of pain and disability that Americans report experiencing has remained "unchanged."

The authors of the study suggest that those with mental health disorders may report experiencing greater pain than those without. In comments made to the *Washington Post*, the study's author, Brian Sites, said that "pain that you may report as a two out of 10, someone with mental health disorders, depression, anxiety, may report as a 10 out of 10." He also noted that opiate use might relieve the symptoms of depression temporarily, causing patients to continue to seek refills.

The study notes that among those adults who suffer

from mental health disorders and are prescribed opioids, the self-reported levels of severe pain experienced are much higher (60 percent) than those with similar disorders who do not use opioids (16.2 percent). When adjusted to include factors such as cancer and musculoskeletal disorders, the authors state "the higher percentage of opioid users persisted among adults with mental health conditions compared with those without ... Most notable was near twice the percentage of opioid users among adults with severe pain (45.3 percent of adults with mental health disorders were opioid users compared with 24.1 percent among those without mental health disorders)."

Taken together the study's conclusions point to the widespread overprescribing of opiates to those diagnosed with mental illnesses, across demographic lines. The authors state "Our findings that patients with mental illness are more likely to receive opioid prescriptions across all different levels of pain suggest that there may be additional patient and provider related factors specific to those with mental illness that increases the likelihood of receiving prescription opioids. Such a relationship is particularly concerning because mental illness is also a prominent risk factor for overdose and other adverse opioid-related outcomes".

Given the four fold increase in opioid prescriptions over the last decade, it is clear that the principal "patient and provider related factors" referenced by the doctors above are the manufacture and marketing of highly addictive narcotics by pharmaceutical companies seeking to bolster their profits at the expense of the public health.

Starting in the 1990's and continuing to the present day, there has been a concerted effort by drug manufacturers to incentivize physicians to expand the prescription of opioid based drugs beyond their traditional use for chronic

diseases such as cancer, to include minor ailments. This has generated vast revenues for the pharmaceutical manufacturers.

Oxycontin, one of the most widely abused narcotics, has generated more than \$35 billion in revenues for Purdue Pharmaceuticals since its introduction in 1996. In 2007, the company was required to pay a \$635 million dollar fine when a court found that the company had intentionally concealed the drug's dangers.

In a report published in 2016, the CDC reported that the overall rate of drug overdose deaths had increased by 137 percent since 2000. Opioid related overdoses by themselves increased by 200 percent in that same time period. From 2013 to 2014 deaths caused by drug overdoses increased by 6.5 %, from 13.8 per 100,000 people to 14.7 per 100,000 people. The report breaks down the increase in deaths caused by different types of opioids: while deaths from semisynthetic opioids and heroin increased by 9 percent and 26 percent respectively, deaths from synthetic opioids increased by 80 percent.

The CDC report states that in 2014 there were more drug overdose deaths than in any other year on record. Opioids accounted for 28,647 of those fatalities, or 61 percent. In that same year, there were 1.5 times more deaths caused by drug overdoses than by automobile accidents.

It must be noted that the increases in both those who suffer from depression and anxiety as well as those addicted to narcotics did not occur in a vacuum. Endless war, ever sharpening social inequality, the attack on jobs and wages and the erosion of democratic rights that accompanied these developments have had a corrosive effect on American life. Many people, indoctrinated with the false belief that there is no alternative to these conditions, fall into despair and turn to drugs for relief. Recognizing this trend, the owners of the pharmaceutical companies and their stockholders have catered to it, earning huge fortunes in the process.



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