



Opioid prescriptions may lead to addiction

A Summary of Evidence

The question of how many people become addicted is a complicated one. There are wide variations in the studies that have looked at this. Statistics range from 0-50% of those treated with chronic opioid therapy will become addicted. (Højsted & Sjøgren, 2007) Many providers were told in the late 1990s that there was almost no chance of addiction if you are treating someone for legitimate pain.

A study by Edlund et al showed that just giving someone a prescription for an opioid pain reliever will triple their risk of developing an opioid use disorder. If someone is placed on chronic, low-dose opioid therapy their risk is 15 times greater. If they are on high-dose chronic opioid therapy, their risk is 122 times greater than those not on opioids. (Edlund et al., 2014)

Many people addicted to opioids will say that the first prescription was the beginning of their problem and that while they may not have been physically dependent, they were effectively addicted after that first prescription. (Doe, 2012)

Implications for Practice

Based on this evidence, Dr. Don Teater notes the following implications for practice:

Opioids should not be prescribed with a cavalier attitude. There must be careful consideration of the risk to the individual and with full informed consent of the dangers of these medications.

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Evidence Summary

Doe, J. (2012). My story: how one Percocet prescription triggered my addiction. *Journal of Medical Toxicology : Official Journal of the American College of Medical Toxicology*, 8(4), 327–9; 329–30. doi:10.1007/s13181-012-0268-5

Edlund, M. J., Martin, B. C., Russo, J. E., Devries, A., Braden, J. B., & Sullivan, M. D. (2014). The Role of Opioid Prescription in Incident Opioid Abuse and Dependence Among Individuals With Chronic Noncancer Pain. *Clin J Pain*, 30(7), 557–564.

Højsted, J., & Sjøgren, P. (2007). Addiction to opioids in chronic pain patients: a literature review. *European Journal of Pain (London, England)*, 11(5), 490–518. doi:10.1016/j.ejpain.2006.08.004