



The Opioid Epidemic:

How Can Nurses Play a Role in Addressing the Issue?

- WHEREAS Opioid dependence and associated drug-related overdose and deaths are serious public health problems and the nation is currently experiencing a deadly surge in addiction to prescription painkillers and other opioids;
- WHEREAS Alabama ranks #1 as the highest painkiller prescribing state in the Nation, Alabama is one of the highest opioid users in the world, in that the United States has only about 5% of the population but uses about 80% of all the opioid drugs;
- WHEREAS Nonmedical use of painkillers in Alabama exceed the national average across all age categories, according to the most recent edition of the National Household Survey on Drug use and Health: 4.71% of Alabama's population above the age of 17, over 175,000 individuals, are estimated to have used pain relievers for nonmedical purposes in the past year;
- WHEREAS For the first time ever in 2015, admissions for opioid use disorders exceeded those for alcohol use disorders;
- WHEREAS Prescription drugs, especially opioid analgesics, increasingly have been implicated in drug overdose deaths over the last decade;
- WHEREAS The number of overdose deaths in Alabama climbed 82 percent from 2006 to 2014;
- WHEREAS The overdose deaths aren't limited to opioids, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has indicated that prescription opioids and heroin account for the majority of drug deaths;
- WHEREAS Registered nurses are on the front lines of addressing this problem by helping patients understand the risks and benefits of pain treatment options, including options that do not involve prescription painkillers;
- WHEREAS APRNs whose advanced education (including advanced pharmacology) prepare them to assume responsibility and accountability for assessment, diagnosis, and management of patients' problems (including the use and prescription of pharmacologic interventions), play a critical role;
- WHEREAS APRNs are prepared to address the need for increased access to treatment;

- WHEREAS APRNs have prescriptive privileges in 49 states and can prescribe Schedule III through V controlled substances with an active DEA license in all except three states (Alabama, Hawaii, and Missouri);
- WHEREAS Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), the most effective form of treatment for opioid use disorders, includes the use of medication along with counseling and other support;
- WHEREAS Combined with behavioral therapy, effective MAT programs for opioid addiction can decrease overdose deaths, be cost-effective, reduce transmissions of HIV and hepatitis C related to IV drug use, and reduce associated criminal activity;
- WHEREAS Because RNs practice in a variety of direct-care, care-coordination, leadership, and executive roles, we are often in a key position to help patients understand the risks and benefits of pain treatment options and can play a key role in the prevention of opioid overuse and dependence;
- WHEREAS As educators and patient advocates, nurses are in a unique position to help patients with pain by using a holistic approach, including therapies that do not involve prescription opioids, such as other medication modalities, regional anesthetic interventions, surgery, psychological therapies, rehabilitative/physical therapy, and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM);
- RESOLVED That the Alabama State Nurses Association (ASNA) advocates for APRN Opioid prescribing practices, to reduce opioid use disorders and overdose;
- RESOLVED That the ASNA promotes expansion in the use of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) along with counseling and other support to reduce opioid use disorders and overdose;
- RESOLVED That the ASNA will publish an article in the Alabama Nurse to increase awareness of the Opioid Epidemic and resources;
- RESOLVED That the ASNA will collaborate with the Governor and other organizations and/or associations to increase awareness and to reduce the Opioid Epidemic.

References:

<http://nursingworld.org/DocumentVault/Health-Policy/Issue-Briefs/ANA-IssueBrief-Opioid-Epidemic>.
<http://www.insurancejournal.com/news/southeast/2016/09/19/426831.htm>
<https://www.thewellnesscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Prescription-Opioid-Use-in-Alabama-Sarah-Harkless>

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