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# Safer Prescription Opioid Use in the Greater Danbury Area

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Community Health Improvement Project  
Newtown Primary Care  
December 2022 – January 2023



The University of Vermont  
LARNER COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

# Problem Identification

- Opioid use disorder (OUD) has been a major public health challenge in the United States. An estimated 3 million people in the U.S. have previously or currently suffer from OUD.<sup>1</sup>
- Opioids are highly addictive, and overdose deaths remain a leading cause of injury-related death in the U.S.<sup>2</sup>
- In the 2019-2022 Danbury Hospital and New Milford Hospital Community Health Needs Assessment Report, one of the identified priority areas was in reducing the number of opioid use disorders, overdoses and related deaths in our region.<sup>3,4</sup>
- “Of the Danbury population... 22% of the population knows at least one person who has died of an opioid overdose.” – *2019 Greater Danbury CHNA*<sup>3,4</sup>
- There is often stigma with opioid use and not enough understanding by community members of its potential for addiction even with a healthcare provider prescription.

# Public Health Cost

- The economic burden of OUD is vast, associated with increased health care expenses, criminal justice spending, lost productivity, reduced quality of life, and loss of life due to opioid overdose deaths.<sup>5</sup>
- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that the U.S. economic cost of opioid use disorder to be \$471 billion, and cost of fatal opioid overdose to be \$550 billion during 2017.<sup>6</sup>
- In Connecticut, the 2020 age-adjusted rate for drug-induced mortality was 39.1 per 100,000 population compared to the 2020 national rate of 28.3.<sup>7</sup>

# Community Perspective

- 29 year-old patient who struggled with opioid misuse 3 years prior and is currently on methadone treatment, stated that he didn't notice the addiction starting until it was too late.
- Medical assistant stated that it would be helpful for patients to have more information on how to take controlled substances such as prescription opioid safely, with signs and symptoms to look for especially for the first-time.
- CVS pharmacist stated that the DisposeRx program, which is meant to decrease the risks of drug overdoses, diverted medications and accidental poisonings, is largely under-utilized because patients are not aware of its existence and how to use it.

# Intervention and Methodology

- In response to Goal 3: “Increase the number of prevention and intervention activities related to opioids”, the objective of my intervention is to empower patients and their family members to better understand indications for opioid use, improve awareness of potential for addiction, how to recognize signs and symptoms of misuse, and how to manage their opioid through safe storage and disposal practices.
- A two-page informational pamphlet was created geared towards patients and family members newly started on opioid medication.
  - Commonly prescribed opioids
  - Indications for prescription opioid use
  - Recognize signs and symptoms of addiction
  - Side effects while on opioid medications
  - Possible withdrawal symptoms with cessation of opioid use (what is safe, what is alarming)
  - Safe storage and disposal practices
  - Local and national resources

# Results

Help is available.

<https://findtreatment.gov/>

## Opioid Disposal Programs in Newtown, CT

CVS Pharmacy drug take-back program and DisposeRx

Prescription Medication Drop Box at Newtown Police Department

Some opioid medications can be flushed in the toilet. See flush list: <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know/drug-disposal-fdas-flush-list-certain-medicines>

## Local and National Resources

Stand Together Danbury

CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (800) 563-4086

## Prescription Opioids

Your guide to safer opioid use



### What are opioids?

Opioids are a class of medications primary used to treat moderate to severe pain. Some other uses are coughing and diarrhea. Because opioids boost feelings of pleasure in your brain, they can be highly addictive. With repeated use over time, your brain may develop a tolerance to opioids. Opioids are typically indicated for short-term pain-relief, except in certain medical circumstances such as cancer pain.

Most commonly prescribed opioids:

- Oxycodone (OxyContin®, Percocet®)
- Hydrocodone (Vicodin®)
- Morphine (Kadian®, Avinza®)
- Oxymorphone (Opana®)
- Codeine
- Methadone

Follow directions as prescribed.

Do not take medication that is not prescribed to you.

Do not give away your medication. Safe disposal methods provided on next page.

May cause drowsiness – Do not drive or use machinery that may cause injury.

Contact your doctor if you experience any side effects.

Talk to your healthcare provider if you continue to experience pain – do not take extra doses.

### Recognize Signs of Misuse / Addiction

Regularly taking more than directed.

Feeling high or sedated.

Drastic mood swings that are atypical.

### Possible side effects:

Opioids can relieve pain and make you feel very happy. However, there are potential harmful effects:

- Drowsiness
- Mental clouding
- Constipation
- Slowed breathing

### Withdrawal symptoms:

These may occur when you stop taking opioids:

- Recurrence of muscle, bone, joint pain
- Sleep disturbances
- Anxiety, restlessness
- Abdominal cramps, diarrhea, nausea and vomiting
- Severe cravings

# Evaluation of Effectiveness and Limitations

- Methods for evaluation of effectiveness:
  - Longitudinal survey may be given to patients and their family members on their perception of the usefulness of the pamphlet
  - Survey questions may include:
    - This information helped me understand safe methods for prescription opioid use.
    - This information helped me with signs and symptoms to look for misuse and addiction.
    - I used the resources provided for safe disposal of my remaining opioids.
- Limitations:
  - This pamphlet is meant to be an adjunct for patients and their family members.
  - Best practices continue to be thorough and effective patient-provider conversations regarding safe opioid prescription use.
  - Mainly geared towards prevention of OUD for those newly on opioids, and does not adequately serve patients who are currently struggling with OUD.



# Recommendations for Future Interventions

- Besides in the primary care setting, this pamphlet may be distributed in pharmacies in the Greater Danbury Area
- Spanish and Portuguese versions of informational pamphlet as fitting for the demographics of the Greater Danbury Area
- Expand the project to interventions at future steps:
  - 1) Prevent opioid use disorder through safe management ← current
  - 2) Intervention through treatment and maintenance programs
  - 3) Support overdose rescue efforts through widespread training and no-cost availability of naloxone

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