Doctors Believe it is Possible to Address Both Chronic Pain and the Opioid Crisis

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Two interconnected epidemics are affecting the United States right now: opioid abuse and chronic pain. The first one is killing thousands of people with overdose, while the other has been a concern of many patients for a long time. Chronic pain is partially responsible for the epidemic. Because doctors have to prescribe opioids to help deal with chronic pain, the patients are at risk of its potential adverse effects.

Both problems are interconnected?which is why doctors believe that the solution should address both of it at once.

Sean Mackey, MD, Stanford?s chief of pain medicine, says that although there are no easy answers, it is possible to address both chronic pain and opioid abuse at the same time.

According to Mackey and Ming-Chih Kao, MD, Ph.D., clinic chief at the Stanford Pain Management Center, 20 million Americans suffer from high-impact chronic pain. This refers to pain so severe that it impairs their daily lives.

Medical advances, according to Mackey, have allowed more people to live longer after surgeries, injuries, and cancer treatments?all of which can produce persistent pain.

At the same time, 130 Americans die every day from overdosing on opioids, the medication that is most commonly used to treat pain. Opioids work by blocking incoming pain signals from entering the brain. Despite being very effective, opioids are also habit-forming and potent. It is easy to get hooked on these substances.

This is why patients are advised to take their medications as prescribed. Some patients become addicted after being prescribed opioids following surgeries or other procedures. Click the link to see Newport Beach's top rehab placement programs.

The number of people with chronic pain complicates the effort to curb the opioid epidemic. It is not possible to just eliminate opioids in their entirety, simply because they help so many people. Mackey and Kao said that restricting access to opioids may seem like a good idea, but it prevents people with chronic pain from refilling their opioid prescriptions. This can force them to live with severe pain?or even push them towards abusing illicit drugs such as heroin.

Conversely, doctors cannot prescribe opioids recklessly, or else the patients will be exposed to the risk of addiction, dependence, and overdose.

?There?s no one-size-fits-all solution,? Mackey said. ?Pain treatment is highly individualized and personalized. I?ve prescribed opioids for chronic pain and seen that they can work long term. But I have taken other patients off them when it was clear they were causing harm.?

Mackey then referenced the United States? National Pain Strategy, a host of tactics outlining solutions to the opioid epidemic. He said that it is important to address both crises. Physical therapy, pain psychology, use of non-opioid pain relief?these are some of the strategies that can work. The National Pain Strategy also emphasizes the need for team-based interdisciplinary care, such as that used at the Pain Management Center.

Tactics can also focus on prevention so that fewer people would suffer from the effects of the epidemic. It can go a long way if a patient?s acute pain can be treated before it develops into chronic pain.

?Every patient?s needs are different, and some will require more opioids for a longer duration than others,? he said. ?Our ultimate goal is to personalize this process by predicting the best treatment path for each patient and each surgery.?

Mackey also suggests that clinicians consider delaying elective surgery for patients until their psychological

needs are addressed. This is because patients with severe psychological distress such as PTSD, anxiety, or depression are more likely to develop addiction after surgery.

?If we address the goals in the National Pain Strategy,? he said, ?it?s going to have a big impact on the dual crises of pain and prescription opioid abuse.?

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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