

More Nurse Practitioners Could Potentially Solve the Opioid Crisis?AANP

July 22, 2019

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The CEO of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) believes that one of the possible solutions to the opioid epidemic is being inexplicably ignored. In his article for TIME, David Hebert said that one crucial element is missing in the fight against the opioid crisis: nurse practitioners.

The article was written by Hebert and Tommy Thompson, who served as US Secretary of Health and Human Services from 2001 to 2005 and as the 42nd Governor of Wisconsin from 1987 to 2001. It was published after the President?s Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) released a new report on how to beat America?s opioid crisis.

While Hebert and Thompson agreed that the CEA?s potential solutions are ?noble goals?, the report is missing one of the best possible answers to the drug crisis, and that is to have more nurse practitioners. Included in CEA?s report are solutions like curbing illicit drug trafficking, reducing over-prescribing in doctors? offices, and cracking down on drug distributors who are fueling the epidemic for profit.

About 72,000 Americans died of a drug overdose last year, according to data from the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention. This means drug overdoses killed almost the same number of people in the US last year as car crashes and guns combined. Over two-thirds of those deaths were related to opioids. In fact, over 130 Americans die every day because of the opioid crisis.

?Primary care professionals are on the front lines of the opioid epidemic. And thanks to advances in ?Medication-Assisted Treatment??which combines medications that temper cravings, like methadone and buprenorphine, with counseling and therapy?they?re better equipped to treat dependence than ever before,? Hebert and Thompson said in the article. ?But the U.S. is suffering from a severe shortage of primary care professionals; a whopping 80 million Americans lack adequate access to primary care.

The shortage is particularly bad in rural areas, where patients are ?almost five times as likely to live in a county with a primary care physician shortage compared to urban and suburban residents,? according to a 2018 UnitedHealth Group report.?

They highlighted the serious problem patients are facing when seeking substance abuse treatment. Without the help of primary care professionals, addicted patients struggle to get sober and stay sober. Nearly 80 percent of Americans addicted to opioids are not receiving treatment at the moment.

?Empowering nurse practitioners to treat addiction?and removing unnecessary restrictions at the state level?can go a long way in liberating American patients,? said Thompson and Hebert. Click the link to see Jamestown's top rehab placement programs.

Nurse practitioners are well-positioned to help patients get the care they need. They are equipped with graduate degrees as well as advanced clinical training. This means NPs are qualified to assess patients, order and interpret diagnostic tests, develop treatment plans, and prescribe medications in all 50 states.

?Studies have shown that NPs provide care that?s just as good as?and sometimes better than?physicians. According to a recent study in the journal Medical Care, Medicare beneficiaries treated by NPs had lower rates of preventable hospital admissions, hospital readmissions, and inappropriate emergency-room visits than those treated by physicians,? said the article.

?Between 2016 and 2030, the number of NPs in the workforce is projected to grow by 6.8% annually, according to a study from Peter Buerhaus a healthcare economist and professor of nursing at Montana State University. The report also found that these NPs will be far more likely to practice in rural and underserved regions.?

However, dozens of states are still limiting where and how NPs can practice. Thompson and Hebert agreed this is unnecessary. For example, many states require NPs to sign elaborate ?collaborative agreements? with

physicians. These agreements reduce primary care options by limiting how and where NPs can practice. Some states even subject NPs to career-long supervision, management, and delegation.

?These restrictions don?t just impact Medication-Assisted Treatment prescribing, they deter NPs from practicing at all. In fact, states with laws that limit NPs? scope of practice have 40% fewer NPs per capita than states without. That?s why they make so little sense?particularly in states where the opioid epidemic is especially dire, said Thompson and Hebert.?

They added: ?Federal lawmakers have demonstrated that they?re serious about ending the opioid epidemic. State lawmakers can show they?re serious by allowing NPs to do their jobs.?

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid or alcohol 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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