

Pharmacists' views of abuse and misuse of opioids in Maine

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Abstract

Opioid addiction and abuse continues to be a problem in the U.S. The U.S. has 5% of the world's population, yet consumes 80% of the world's opioids. One epicenter of the crisis is Maine, where 21.9% of the population received at least one opioid prescription in 2014. In 2014, we conducted a survey of licensed pharmacists in Maine to assess their views regarding practice needs in Maine, including views on opioids.

A structured survey was developed based upon the "needs" identified by key informants. The survey was sent to all licensed pharmacists in the State (n=1,262). A 22% response rate was achieved (n=279). Survey questions included pharmacy practice setting (e.g., retail), years of experience, urban/rural locality, and views on practice needs. Questions regarding opiates included misuse, diversion, theft, and legitimate access; each assessed on a 6-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree and 6=strongly agree).

Views of opiate misuse varied by setting (F=2.15, p=0.04). Pharmacists working in long term care agreed that misuse was an issue to a lesser degree than those working in retail (mean score 4.79 vs 5.56, respectively). Views of opioids did not vary by years in practice; however educational attainment (PharmD vs R.Ph.) influenced views on diversion (4.84 vs 5.15, p=0.02). Pharmacists serving rural populations viewed legitimate access (mean = 4.54 vs 4.12, p=0.02) and theft (4.45 vs 4.02, p=0.03) as bigger concerns than those serving urban populations.

These findings indicate that opioid misuse and diversion are a sizeable problem, and of particular note to Maine pharmacists.

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Learning Objectives: Describe differing views of the use, misuse, and abuse of opioids in Maine.

Target Audiences: Pharmacists, substance abuse prevention specialists, substance abuse counselors, social workers, case managers

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