

Program: Assessing the Real-World Risks and Benefits of Medications that can be Abused

Speaker: Patrick D. Quinn, Ph.D., Dept. of Applied Health Science, IU School of Public Health

Introduced by: Marty Meisenheimer

Attendance: 152

Guests: Joan Karp, Peter Iversen, Mark Sperka, Herbert Tesser

Scribe: Donald Mink

Editor: Carl Warner

Dr. Quinn is a Clinical Psychologist and does assessment and psychotherapy for Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and other mental health conditions. His research focus is addiction and medications that can be abused. Dr. Quinn's work receives funding from the NIH and the Swedish government and not from pharmaceutical companies.

As an overview, the three big addiction issues in 2019 are: (1) What is the "opioid epidemic"? (2) What role has opioid pain medication prescription played? (3) Will stimulant ADHD medications cause another crisis? Substance Use Disorder (SUD) is a more definitive term than "addiction".

"Opioid Epidemic": Drug overdose fatalities have increased exponentially since at least the late 1970's, driven mainly by licit and illicit opioids. The rise in opioid overdose deaths came in three waves: (1) prescriptions, (2) heroin, and (3) synthetics (tramadol, fentanyl). The recent increase in deaths is largely due to synthetics. Most substance use (tobacco, alcohol, marijuana) is not increasing, and the greatest abuse by far is with legal substances. The "opioid epidemic" is a "fatal overdose epidemic".

Did opioid pain medication cause the problem? Pathways to opioid problems include illicit opioids (heroin, fentanyl), diverted prescription opioids, and prescribed use. The United States is, by far, the greatest user of prescription opioids. We do not really yet know which treatment protocol is safe and effective, and for whom its use is proper; effective research is not available.

Is an ADHD medication crisis next? ADHD is certainly recognized and diagnosed now more than ever, and children, adolescents, and adults with ADHD are at serious disadvantages. Medication treatment reduces ADHD symptoms and seems to help prevent many harmful outcomes including accidents, injuries, criminal behavior, and substance use disorders (addiction). Although misuse may be common and not a good thing, medicating for ADHD does not seem to be causing a major increase in overdose and SUD.

Patrick Quinn



