

ECOSOC

CIMUN

**Topic 3: Prevent the abuse of opioids as treatment by medical
professionals**

Matteo Piccini and Roumpini Moulavasili



Introduction

The abuse of opioid narcotics as treatment by medical professionals is one that has been a main focus of countries like the USA and Canada for many years. Abuse of opioid prescriptions lead to addiction and overdoses in patients. This research report will cover the important information about the opioid epidemic as well as UN resolutions and reports relating to the topic. Finally it will include previous attempts at resolving the issue as well as possible solutions for the delegates to consider.

Definition of Key Terms

Opioids: they are a class of drugs used for pain management which includes prescription legal narcotics like oxycodone and morphine, as well as illegal ones like heroin (“Opioids”)

Abuse: misuse/excessive use of harmful substances

Background Information

Globally, opioids are the cause of two-thirds of all drug related deaths (United Nations). According to the CDC, in 2016, over 11.5 million Americans reported the misuse of prescription opioids (“About CDC’s Opioid”). North America is the most affected area by the opioid crisis with a total of 153,260,450 opioid prescriptions in 2019 (“U.S. Opioid Dispensing Rate Maps”). Opioids are considered psychoactive drugs since they affect pain levels and slow down actions such as breathing and heart rate (Canadian Institute). Medical professionals prescribe them for both chronic pain and as a more short term solution.

In 2017 around 2 million Americans misused prescribed narcotics (“What is the Scope”). Due to the abuse of prescription opioids Americans are overdosing and dying. A 2016 study found that 23.7% of all drug overdose deaths were caused by prescribed opioids (“Fentanyl and Other”). As healthcare professionals abuse opioids as treatment, more people get addicted and overdose, or turn to more illegal opioids, such as heroin, which puts both their health and their well being in peril.

In an effort to address the lack of treatment when it came to pain, opioids began being prescribed, thus leading to the exploitation by pharmaceutical companies looking to expand their market. Pharmaceutical companies began selling opioids directly to doctors and targeting the ones that were most likely to prescribe more narcotics (Annan). The marketing strategy of opioid companies promotes and advertises high doses of opioids while downplaying the risks of excessive use of the narcotics (Marks). Pharmaceutical companies also influence medical

professionals by sending them ‘gifts’ and payments in order to urge them to prescribe more opioids (Marks). Due to this marketing strategy, between 2014 and 2015, doctors wrote “seventy opioid prescriptions per year for every hundred Americans” which in turn led to a higher number of overdoses and increased mortality rates (Marks).

Both the United States and Canada have set regulations and guidelines for medical professionals in an effort to reduce opioid prescribing in their respective countries. Australia has set down regulations reducing opioid prescriptions when relating to short term pain management (“Prescription Opioids”).

Major countries and groups involved

United States of America: It is the country most affected by the opioid epidemic, with a high mortality rate and aggressive marketing by pharmaceutical companies.

Canada: Canada is second in opioid consumption with their overdosing rates increasing as the prescriptions for opioids (Annan).

Center of Disease Control: The CDC a US government organization that is overlooking the opioid crisis and is responsible for the prescription guidelines for doctors when prescribing opioids.

Relevant UN resolutions and reports

Despite the ambiguity of the question, the UN, being the CND and ECOSOC entities, have actively addressed the abuse of opioids in non-medical occurrences, especially in the case of treatment.

2017 Resolution 61/8 of the CND (Resolution 61/8):

- Enhancing and strengthening international and regional cooperation and domestic efforts to address the international threats posed by the non-medical use of synthetic opioids
 - This resolution, although not specific to the abuse of opioids, urges member states to increase cooperation for the abuse of opioids in non-medical environments. For instance, operative clause number 3:
 - Calling upon member states to explore innovative approaches to more effectively deal with the issue by broadening the control of these opioids and the education of even those authorities in charge of distributing them, such as medical professionals.

- Operative Clause number 4: also calling for member states to take appropriate measures in accordance with national legislation to call the attention of health-care professionals by initiating cooperation efforts with pharmaceutical companies. Through the producers of the actual drugs, abuse and overdose of opioids, for even the most hard to treat conditions.

2012 Resolution 55/7 of the CND (Resolution 55/7):

- Promoting measures to prevent drug overdose, in particular opioid overdose

2017 Resolution 62/4 of the CND (Resolution 62/4):

- Advancing effective and innovative approaches, through national, regional and international action, to address the multifaceted challenges posed by the non-medical use of synthetic drugs, particularly synthetic opioids

Previous attempts at resolving the issue

Apart from the aforementioned 3 resolutions, the UN has actively worked with healthcare entities such as the American Centre for Disease Control. For instance, the Better World Campaign (BWC) has taken an active role in the US congress in cooperation with the United Nations in addressing the public health crisis and the issues that arise when it is fuelled by medical professionals.

Since the question has a great connection to the opioid abuse by medical professionals in the United States, one example of the U.S.-UN partnership raised during the annual UNODC high-level conference, at the request of the U.S, participating member states agreed to include two primary ingredients that are used to produce fentanyl. The same ingredients were added to an international control list. What is more, the US Department of State said that “this action will make it harder for the criminals that are illicitly producing fentanyl to access the necessary resources. It will require countries to regulate the production, sale, and export of the precursors to fentanyl, and to criminalize sale or trafficking outside of those regulations. (Hannun)”

Agencies such as UNODC and the CND also provide critical field assistance to local governments in different countries through many offices. This assistance can range from operating laboratories for the study of narcotics and providing inspectors to supervise medical professionals in areas that are known to have cases of abuse and overdose.

Furthermore, the World Health Organisation (WHO) also supports countries in monitoring drug use and helps educate professionals on opioid dependence and what is happening within a nation’s borders in order for events to be reported to the ruling authorities (Hannun).

Possible solutions/examples of Operative clauses

Similar to the solutions and resolutions already in place by the UN, delegates should try and shape their resolutions and clauses around the idea of education of medical professionals and greater control on what is exactly prescribed. These can be achieved through pharmacies being another layer of security in the prescription of opioids and other prescription drugs in order to avoid the possibility of mistakes in calculating dosage or the purposeful overdose prescription.

- Other solutions can include: increasing cooperation being national health agencies and the WHO, CND and ECOSOC commission as a platform for countries to share what unique aspects there are to opioid abuse by medical professionals.
 - This could be achieved through increasing control of the actual drugs coming in from other nations in order to surveil the sort of patients they are prescribed to,
 - Allowing for prevention in the case of prescription by medical professionals.

Works Cited:

"About CDC's Opioid Prescribing Guideline | CDC's Response to the Opioid Overdose Epidemic | CDC." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 22 June 2021, www.cdc.gov/opioids/providers/prescribing/guideline.html.

Annan, Kofi, et al. *The Opioid Crisis in North America*. Global Commission on Drug Policy, 2017. www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2017-GCDP-Position-Paper-Opioid-Crisis-ENG.pdf.

Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research. "Learn About Opioids." *We're Here to Help | Here to Help*, www.heretohelp.bc.ca/infosheet/learn-about-opioids.

"Fentanyl and Other Synthetic Opioids Drug Overdose Deaths." *National Institute on Drug Abuse*, 25 Nov. 2020, www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/trends-statistics/infographics/fentanyl-other-synthetic-opioids-drug-overdose-deaths.

Hannun, Jordie, "Spotlighting the UN's Role in Combating the Opioid Crisis", Better World Campaign, <https://betterworldcampaign.org/blog/usun-opioid-crisis/>

Marks, Jonathan H. "Lessons from Corporate Influence in the Opioid Epidemic: Toward a Norm

of Separation." *PubMed Central (PMC)*, 13 July 2020,
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7357445/.

"Opioids." *National Institute on Drug Abuse*, 7 June 2021,
www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/opioids.

"Prescription Opioids: Information for Consumers, Patients and Carers." *Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)*, 22 June 2021,
www.tga.gov.au/prescription-opioids-information-consumers-patients-and-carers.

Resolution 55/7, "Promoting measures to prevent drug overdose, in particular opioid overdose",
CND,
https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/Drug_Resolutions/2010-2019/2012/CND_Res-55-7.pdf

Resolution 61/8, "Enhancing and strengthening international and regional cooperation and domestic efforts to address the international threats posed by the non-medical use of synthetic opioids", *CND*,
https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_61/CND_res2018/CND_Resolution_61_8.pdf.

Resolution 62/4, "Advancing effective and innovative approaches, through national, regional and international action, to address the multifaceted challenges posed by the non-medical use of synthetic drugs, particularly synthetic opioids", *CND*,
https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/Drug_Resolutions/2010-2019/2019/CND_Resolution_62_4.pdf.

United Nations. "UN Responds to the Global Opioid Crisis." *United Nations*, 22 Mar. 2021,
www.un.org/en/delegate/un-responds-global-opioid-crisis.

"U.S. Opioid Dispensing Rate Maps." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 23 June 2021, www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/rxrate-maps/index.html.

"What is the Scope of Prescription Drug Misuse?" *National Institute on Drug Abuse*, 13 Apr. 2021,
www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/what-scope-prescription-drug-misuse.