Debunking Myths About The Past, Present And Future of Opioids

By Jamie Wells, M.D. — June 18, 2018

The “opioid epidemic” consistently addressed in the news, by politicians and throughout social media conflates many aspects of the issue, often speaking interchangeably about prescription medications and illicit drugs. When the narrative and identifying of the problems get so confused and blurred or legal and political grandstanding becomes more about virtue signaling than honest analysis of multifactorial causal agents and helpful action, the solutions get further and further out of reach. As does the suffering.

The mere existence of an opioid pill is not why there is a crisis.

Myths abound in the public forum surrounding who caused it, what “it” actually is, how we got here, what it will take to fix it and who we can blame for the totality of a truly complex situation. Reducing the discussion to “evil” Pharma or pill mill bad actors does a disservice to making genuine strides in combating the innumerable factors at play that created surging rates of heroin and fentanyl-laced street drug use that have claimed far too many lives.

All too often, the stories or talking points being told are not accurate depictions of the many contributing influences. And all but ignore any focus on the forgotten children, the tremendous health care burden their exposures are costing - financially, emotionally, physically, developmentally etc., and how to break the cycle of addiction, in general, to prevent future perpetuation of such devastating consequences.

We like putting band-aids on ruptured arteries as policy, instead of performing the comprehensive task of looking inward and determining the myriad number of root causes for a problem. This practice of external blame game simply kicks the can down the road, often paying less dividends
overall, not helping those most in need and complicating matters more than necessary.

If family-centered programming is not at the core of remedies, then cure will remain out of sight. These and other aspects of the opioid epidemic were touched upon in a recent podcast I did on the topic.

I had the distinct pleasure of being interviewed by Julie Gunlock [2], the Independent Women’s Forum Director for the Center for Progress and Innovation, on the complexities of the opioid epidemic and had the opportunity to tease out some of these subjects (e.g. prescription sharing, doctor shopping, pain as vital sign, multi-drug use/abuse) while also addressing the pediatric and adolescent difficulties often lost in the mix. (See here [2] for her summary and access “The Forgotten Children of the Opioid Epidemic” podcast).
In this recording (click here [3]), you will learn about the historical context of society’s current predicament and what is necessary to improve conditions and ensure a promising future. There
are many social determinants of health and well-being that warrant discussion and require proactive measures to empower people to succeed in conquering these challenges and to help others entirely avoid developing new addictions.


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