

## OxyContin headlines: you better read the article

*By ACSH Staff — March 13, 2015*

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the press publish results of junk science as if they were undeniably true, but they also frequently write headlines that contradict the already-dubious results of whatever study they may be covering.

The latest example of this involves a ubiquitous news story as of late opiate addiction and abuse in the U.S. This is a pervasive and serious problem that has claimed and ruined many lives. Yet, the clever science that succeeded in diminishing this problem is mostly portrayed as a failure. It is not.

A new [study](#) [1] conducted at Washington University in St. Louis is entitled: Harder-to-abuse OxyContin doesn't stop addicts. Is this true? And is it even feasible?

OxyContin is a high-dose, timed-release version of oxycodone (the narcotic found in Percocet). It was designed to provide long-acting relief by maintaining a relatively stable blood level of the drug. This provides a number of benefits for people who suffer from chronic severe pain.

It did just that but the pill, which contained a very high dose of oxycodone made to be released gradually, inadvertently created an entirely different set of problems. By simply grinding up the pill, the time-release properties of the pill disappeared, providing addicts with a huge amount of a strong, highly addictive narcotic. This, of course, contributed substantially to an already-serious addiction problem.

Purdue Pharma the makers of OxyContin worked for years to make an abuse-deterrent formulation of the pill, which was approved in 2010. It worked. OxyContin abuse dropped sharply.

But now, if you unquestionably accept the headlines, you can only conclude that it didn't really

work after all. Here are two of many examples:

Crush-Proof OxyContin Pills Have Done Little To Curb America's Problem With Drug Abuse

Study finds abuse deterrent OxyContin is a failure

So, says ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom, who has written frequently about this issue, The whole idea was a complete bust, right? Hardly.

There is an apparent disconnect between the results of the study, (which appeared in the March 11th JAMA) and the title : Harder-to-abuse OxyContin doesn't stop addicts.

This becomes evident in the first paragraph of the paper: A reformulation of OxyContin that makes it harder to abuse has curtailed the drug's illicit use. But some 25 percent of drug abusers entering rehab said they still abused the prescription painkiller despite package labeling that emphasizes its abuse-deterrent properties, new research indicates.

Dr. Bloom says, If we rephrase this paragraph a bit, it becomes About 75 percent of drug abusers entering rehab said that that they previously used to abuse OxyContin, but no longer do so. Is this really the abysmal failure that the headline seems to indicate?

First author Theodore J. Cicero, PhD, a professor of neuropharmacology in psychiatry said, We found that the abuse-deterrent formulation was useful as a first line of defense. OxyContin abuse in people seeking treatment declined, but that decline slowed after a while. And during that same time period, heroin use increased dramatically.

Dr. Bloom says, All of this indicates what we have been saying all along: That drug abuse in the US has been, is, and will continue to be a huge problem. Companies like Purdue can do their best to ensure that its product is less prone to abuse, but anyone who was expecting this to work perfectly is living in a dream world.

Dr. Bloom's recent Science 2.0 piece, *The New York Times On Drugs - Wrong, Naive Or Misleading?* discusses foolish attempts to control narcotic abuse that not only won't work, but will serve only to punish patients in need. You can read it [here](#) [2].

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