Significant Pain Significantly Increases Risk of Opioid Addiction

By ACSH Staff — July 25, 2016

Chronic pain is debilitating, it takes over your life, according to patients. The prospect of ongoing pain is why torture is effective. One of the struggles in modern pain mitigation is how to prevent opioid addiction without adding to the suffering of those with chronic pain, such as cancer patients.

Part of the problem is a lack of ability to clinically describe pain and the varying levels of severity. New survey data analysis finds that people who report even moderate pain are 41 percent more likely to develop an opioid addiction. The data were from a national survey of alcohol and substance use in more than 34,000 adults in two waves, three years apart. The scholars examined age, gender, anxiety or mood disorders, and family history of drug, alcohol, and behavioral problems, along with pain (measured on a five-point scale of pain-related interference in daily activities) and prescription opioid use disorders.

Using a structural equation model, those with pain and those with prescription opioid use disorders were more likely to report recent substance use, mood, or anxiety disorders or have a family history of alcohol use disorder. Males and younger adults were at increased risk of prescription opioid use disorders, females and older adults were more likely to report pain.

Citation: Carlos Blanco, M.D., Ph.D., Melanie M. Wall, Ph.D., Mayumi Okuda, M.D., Shuai Wang, Ph.D., Miren Iza, M.D., Mark Olfson, M.D., M.P.H., Pain as a Predictor of Opioid Use Disorder in a Nationally Representative Sample, The American Journal of Psychiatry, July 22, 2016, http://dx.doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2016.15091179