

Health care workers trained on Rx drug abuse

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(Medical Xpress)—A Colorado health care training course designed to curb prescription drug abuse, reports preliminary data that state-wide chronic pain prescription practices are changing since first offering the training a year ago. The indication that prescription practices are changing is a positive step toward addressing national concern for opioid drug dependency.

Called an epidemic by public health professionals, prescription drug misuse and abuse in the U.S. continues to grow as [chronic pain](#) patients are prescribed opioid treatment. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation reports nearly 82 Americans die every day as a result of an unintentional overdose.

A team of Colorado researchers and [health care](#) providers at the Center for Worker Health and Environment at the Colorado School of Public Health seeks to change that statistic. Through a partnership with COPIC and the Colorado Medical Society, and with funding from Pinnacol Assurance, the Center developed and launched an online educational course to retrain health care providers on updated state and federal chronic pain management guidelines and instructions for which the evidence-based best practices ought to be utilized prior to prescribing opioids.

"The goal of this private-public initiative is to help improve practice, address the epidemic of opioid prescription-associated health problems and improve care," said Alfred Gilchrist, CEO of the Colorado Medical

Society.

The online training, "The Opioid Crisis: Guidelines and Tools for Improving Chronic Pain Management" has enrolled over 1,000 Colorado [health care providers](#) since launching last November.

"The level of interest and engagement that we are seeing in the medical community indicates that practitioners are taking this major [public health](#) issue seriously," states Center Director Lee Newman, MD. "We are greatly encouraged by the high number of prescribers who recognize that by improving how they treat patients who experience chronic, non-cancer pain, they can also help turn the tide on the opioid prescription epidemic."

Importantly, the Center reports evidence that the tide may be turning based on provider-reported prescription practices.

A three-month follow-up survey indicates that providers have changed their [chronic pain management](#) practices based on what they learned in the course. Of the providers who currently manage pain patients, 84 percent of survey respondents said they changed the way that they practice. Nearly 80 percent agreed or strongly agreed that their knowledge about the treatment and management of non-cancer chronic pain increased as a result of taking the course. And 74.8 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they are more confident in their ability to manage chronic, non-cancer pain patients.

Edward Leary, MD, Pinnacle Assurance medical director relates, "many providers who I have spoken with around Colorado tell me that they are confronted with situations in which opioid use would be inappropriate and the educational content of the online training has been very helpful in their patient treatment planning."

For providers who took the course but are not currently managing chronic pain patients, the training was still significant. 79.2 percent of these respondents indicated that they now coordinate care with providers who do manage chronic patients, based on the knowledge that they gained in the course. The researchers will be looking at how the training impacts overall prescription trends in the state.

The Center's attributes the training success and participation on the partnership with COPIC and the Colorado Medical Society. Both organizations endorsed the training course and COPIC provided incentives to providers in the form of insurance policy discounts.

"COPIC promotes the course as a valuable resource in the ongoing education activities that we encourage our insured to participate in. The course's website and toolkit offer some of the best evidence-based learning to address this important issue," said Alan Lembitz, MD, COPIC's chief medical officer.

Provided by University of Colorado Denver

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