

Experts question push for 'abuse-deterrent' Rx opioids

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Credit: Yale University

In response to the rise in opioid overdose deaths nationwide, pharmaceutical companies have developed formulations of prescription opioids designed to prevent tampering or abuse. These "abuse-deterrent" forms, however, are expensive and may not actually have the intended effect, say experts from Yale School of Medicine.

In a Perspective piece published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (*NEJM*), Drs. William Becker and David Fiellin explore the potential pitfalls and benefits of moving toward greater prescribing of abuse-deterrent opioids. This approach, they said, may distract physicians from the goal—stated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—of pursuing alternatives to opioids to treat pain, especially long-term. These alternatives include evidence-based treatments like [cognitive behavioral therapy](#), structured exercise programs, yoga, and [mindfulness-based stress reduction](#), they said.

Taking opioids at a higher dose than prescribed is the most common way the drugs are misused. But the abuse-deterrent formulations, which include extended release pills and gels that are difficult to inject, don't prevent patients from taking higher-than-prescribed doses, the authors noted. Additionally, the new formulations do not address the many adverse effects of taking opioids, which include a higher risk of death from using the drugs long-term.

As physicians and policymakers wrestle with how to reduce [opioid](#) overdose deaths, Becker and Fiellin encourage them to expand access to addiction treatment and focus on the evidence, which fails to show benefit for many patients from long-term use of opioids—abuse-deterrent or not.

"Unfortunately, the hope that long-term opioid therapy would be effective for chronic pain has not borne out," said Becker. "Expensive endeavors to make 'abuse-deterrent' formulations are not what the field and, most importantly, patients need."

More information: William C. Becker et al. Abuse-Deterrent Opioid Formulations—Putting the Potential Benefits into Perspective, *New England Journal of Medicine* (2017). [DOI: 10.1056/NEJMp1701553](https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMp1701553)

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