

Narcotics, also called opioids, are a necessary and important part of medical care. Painkillers -- narcotic analgesics -- contain some type of opioid medication to ease discomfort and pain. The benefit of administering analgesics is the relief of pain and suffering.

Narcotics come with risks and dependency. Substance abuse affects all socioeconomic groups and has become a major medical, social, and economic challenge for society. According to the Centers for Disease Control, one in 68 people in the US is a substance abuser and 19.5 million people over the age of 12 use illegal drugs resulting in 19,000 deaths per year.

A medication is misused whenever a person indiscriminately uses the medication (such as when an individual uses medication that was prescribed for someone else). A medication becomes abused when the person continually self-medicates resulting in a physical and/or a psychological dependence on the drug.

Depending on what drug a person has taken, symptoms of addiction and overdose vary. It is not always easy to recognize overdose symptoms when someone has used too much of an opioid drug, because the drug's effects are so similar. People may not realize they are experiencing an overdose, especially if they are heavily under the influence of that drug. Some of the symptoms of overdose include severe chest pain, seizure, severe headache, difficulty breathing, and either delirium, extreme agitation, or anxiety.

Alternative treatments are Acetaminophen, NSAIDs, Corticosteroids, Topical medications, Injections, massage, exercise and Physical Therapy.

On February 15, 2017, Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey signed legislation aimed to curb the state's opioid addiction epidemic. The move came just 1 month after Christie declared opioid drug abuse a public health crisis in New Jersey and pledged to focus his remaining year in office to aggressively address the issue.

The new legislation limits initial opioid prescriptions to a 5-day supply, making New Jersey's limit 1 of the strictest in the country. The law also mandates state-regulated health insurers cover the first 4 weeks of inpatient or outpatient substance abuse treatment without the need for authorization. Insurers must provide additional coverage for up to 6 months of treatment, including medication-assisted treatments, if deemed medically necessary. This means that prior authorizations on buprenorphine and naltrexone products for opioid dependence must be removed. According to Christie, the insurance mandate will prevent people from being denied drug treatment.

The prescription drug limit would not apply to patients with cancer and for end-of-life hospice care. To address concerns about patients with pain that exceeds 5 days, the law allows physicians to easily add another 5 days to the original opioid prescription if the patient's pain has not subsided. Just as important, the law mandates physicians create a pain-management treatment plan for patients that require chronic opioid use. It also requires physicians to obtain a written record that the risks of taking opioids has been discussed with the patient.