

Most Opioids in the United States Go to 10% of Patients Prescribed Opioids

There is undoubtedly an opioid epidemic in the United States. A Business Insider article from 2016 ranks West Virginia as third in the United States for opioid prescriptions with 137.6 prescriptions per 100 residents. West Virginia also rank in the top 10 for number of high dose prescription opioids per 100 residents (6.2) and number of extended release or long acting opioid prescriptions per 100 residents (15.7). A recent letter published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* shows that the top 10% of patients without cancer with an opioid prescription account for 76% of opioid use (in relation to morphine equivalents).

19,530,587 non-cancer patients on private insurance with a prescription for a common oral opioid (hydrocodone that is not part of a cough/cold formulation, hydromorphone, morphine, oxymorphone, and oxycodone) who had been on therapy for at least one year from 2001-2013 were analyzed. The opioid doses were converted to morphine equivalents (MEQs) and compared to one another. In 2001, the top 10% of opioid users accounted for just under 70% of the total use of opioids (in MEQs) with an upward trend to 76% in 2013.

The article does not address appropriate vs inappropriate use of opioids, prescribing practices, or scheduled vs as needed dosing. Although further research needs to be done, . Knowing that a small subset of the population accounts for such a large amount of opioid use could lead to analyzing this population further. Commonalities among these patients could potentially lead to a reduction in unnecessary/excessive prescribing, which hopefully would lead to an overall reduction in the opioid crisis.

References:

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3. Jacobs H. The states prescribing the most painkillers aren't the ones you think [updated 23 March 2016]. Business Insider. Available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/these-are-the-states-prescribing-the-most-opioid-painkillers-2016-3>