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Call for special issue on opioid epidemic: Response



Approximately one year ago, we announced a call for manuscripts related to a special issue of *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing* focused on the opioid epidemic. Three articles were selected and are featured in this issue: a) *Survey of US states' policies regarding maternal opioid use and neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome*; (b) *Working with families impacted by the opioid crisis: education, best practices and providing hope*, and (c) *Suicidal ideation, plan, attempts and nonmedical prescription opioid use among U.S. adults*.

The opioid epidemic is a public health crisis on a global scale. Nurses have witnessed the significant toll this epidemic has exacted upon individuals, families, and entire communities. In 2015, an estimated 5% of the global adult population (quarter of a billion people) used drugs at least once, and of those individuals, 29.5 million are struggling with a diagnosable substance use disorder. Opioids, including heroin, is associated with an increased risk of fatal and non-fatal overdoses, acquiring an infectious disease (e.g., HIV and hepatitis C), and the development of other physical and psychiatric co-morbidities (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNDOC], 2017).

While progress has been made in the United States, including a decrease in opioid prescribing and an increase in the number of treatment facilities providing medication-assisted treatment (MAT), and patients receiving buprenorphine and naltrexone prescriptions, access to evidence-based services for the treatment of substance use disorders remains limited (McCance-Katz, 2018). Low- and middle-income countries suffer the heaviest burden, and the equitable division of resources across geographic, ethnic, and racial groups worldwide, has not been realized (World Health Organization, 2018).

The opioid epidemic requires the mobilization of worldwide resources and the attention of healthcare providers across disciplines (Collins, Koroshetz, & Volkow, 2018; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2018). As the largest group of healthcare professionals, nurses have a unique opportunity to assume a leading role in providing, and advocating for, a holistic, evidence-based approach to the early identification of risky substance use and the treatment of substance use disorders (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2018). We must engage in deliberate conversations about our readiness to effectively assist our patients who use or misuse substances or are currently struggling with a substance use disorder. We need to first determine if a critical mass of nurses exists with the requisite knowledge, skills and confidence to tackle the opioid epidemic. If the answer is no, the next step is to identify

and implement changes to ensure the nursing workforce is prepared to provide evidence-based care across treatment settings for diverse patient populations.

ISPN strives to improve behavioral health for all persons as evidenced by its partnership with the Royal College of Nursing on the 25th International Mental Health Nursing Research Conference, *From Global to Local: Mental Health in a Connected World*, to be held on September 12 & 13, 2019 in London.

As a key stakeholder and trusted patient advocate you can advance the mission of ISPN by taking the following steps:

Educators and academic institutions:

1. Teach evidence-based approaches to the early identification of risky substance use and the treatment of substance use disorders.
2. Enhance the nursing curriculum to include content relative to the unique clinical needs of diverse patient populations.

Health care professionals:

1. Become qualified to prescribe buprenorphine for the treatment of opioid use disorder.
2. Advocate for the delivery of MAT to all patient populations.
3. Engage in continuing education to remain current and clinically relevant.

Healthcare Systems and Professional Associations:

1. Create stronger connections between behavioral health providers and mainstream medical systems to facilitate referral to different levels of treatment.
2. Engage primary care providers and other professionals in a comprehensive approach to the treatment of substance use disorders.
3. Offer training in MAT to current and future staff.
4. Advocate for health policies that promote accessible treatment options for all patients.

Researchers

1. Conduct research that focuses on implementable, sustainable solutions for high-priority substance use issues.
2. Promote rigorous evaluation of programs and policies.

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