

Opioids, Addictions, and YOU

A Resource for University of Alberta Resident Physicians

Did You Know...

- Alberta has seen 1 death almost every 12 hours in the year 2018 due to opioid overdoses.
- People who use opioids may not even know that they are taking fentanyl.
- Fentanyl is often mixed with other street drugs.
- As with the general public, approximately 8–10% of physicians have substance problems, including alcohol, opioids and others.
- Addiction is a common, chronic, relapsing health condition.
- It is important that it is diagnosed early, and a treatment plan is made and adhered to.
- The U of A, AMA, and CPSA have resources available to help and work with residents in supportive, rather than punitive, fashion.

Some Signs and Symptoms of Opioid Addiction...

- **Acute intoxication:** slurred speech; appearing “sedated”; pinpoint pupils; or visible injection sites.
- **Withdrawal:** anxiety; drug-craving; increased respiratory rate; increased heart rate; abdominal discomfort; and /or nausea and vomiting.
- **Tolerance:** may not show any effects.
- **Other signs:** “impaired social functioning”; engaging in “illegal behaviours” (e.g., to obtain money to purchase opioids); or legal problems.
- Opioid overdoses can be fatal.

Opioids, Addictions and Your Health as a Resident

The importance of physician health is often under-appreciated during residency training and even into independent practice. It is important to remain vigilant about your own health.

If you do develop an addiction, it is also important to seek help and assistance from the support systems outlined below, your family doctor, and if needed, from specialists involved in your care.

Opioid Mechanism of Action...

- Opioids are a diverse group of analgesic medications.
- They bind to opioid receptors (mu, delta or kappa) in the brain.
- Their effects are mainly inhibitory as they cause a decrease in neuronal excitability.
- Through their interaction with other cellular processes, they decrease the release of neurotransmitters involved in the sensation and perception of pain.
- This causes a blunted perception of pain and can increase feelings of pleasure.

Addictive potential of Opioids...

- The feelings of pleasure resulting from opioid use can make individuals want to continue experiencing those feelings.
- This can lead to individuals not taking opioids as prescribed and can lead to dependence.

Opioid Addictions in Residents and Occupational Health and Safety Implications ...

- Opioid use can affect both physical and cognitive function.
- Opioid use can result in slower reaction times.
- Opioid use can also lead to drowsiness and altered level of consciousness.
- Opioid use can result in a lack of insight and poor decision-making.
- As mentioned elsewhere in this resource, opioid overdoses can be fatal.

Bottom Line!

Residents impaired from improper use of opioids are more likely to make medical errors, neglect patient care, and be involved in serious workplace accidents that could cause harm to others and to themselves.

How to Get Help!

The Office of Advocacy & Wellness (OAW)

<https://www.ualberta.ca/medicine/programs/support-wellness/postgraduate>

CALL: 780-492-3092 / 780-492-3150

The OAW looks after issues pertaining to the health and well-being of learners. The Office also advocates on their behalf. Learner health and well-being include all areas related to both physical and mental health. It also provides counselling on academic and personal matters.

The Alberta Medical Association (AMA)'s Physician & Family Support Program (PFSP)

<https://www.albertadoctors.org/services/pfsp>

CALL: 1-877-SOS-4MDS

1-877-767-4637

CONFIDENTIAL 24 hours a day / 7 days a week / 365 days a year.

This resource was compiled by a Subcommittee of the U of A PGME's Resident Well-Being Committee (RWBC) consisting of:

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For more information on the RWBC see:

<https://www.ualberta.ca/medicine/programs/supportwellness/postgraduate/committee>