



Position Statement - Opioid Epidemic: Addressing the Growing Drug Overdose Problem

Opioid dependence and associated drug-related overdose and deaths are serious public health problems that are catalyzing lawmakers across the political spectrum to demand action. Deaths from drug overdose have risen steadily and have become the leading cause of injury death in the United States. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention opioids, including prescription painkillers, were factors in more than 33,000 deaths across the U.S. in 2015, and opioid overdoses have more than quadrupled since 2000. Since 2009 more Oklahoma residents have died from opioid-related deaths than in vehicle crashes according to the Oklahoma Attorney General Mike Hunter. Naloxone (Narcan) is a life-saving medication that rapidly blocks the effects of opioids when signs and symptoms of a prescription opioid or heroin overdose first appear, which is currently available without a prescription in the state of Oklahoma.

Oklahoma is one of the leading states in prescription painkiller sales per capita, with 128 painkiller prescriptions dispensed per 100 people in 2012 according to an Oklahoma State Report entitled, **2016 Reducing Prescription Drug Abuse In Oklahoma**. Oklahoma Attorney General Mike Hunter sued more than a dozen manufacturers of opioid pain medication, alleging that deceptive marketing campaigns by the drug makers have fueled the state's opioid epidemic.

In 2017 the Oklahoma Commission on Opioid Abuse was created by the Legislature to develop a comprehensive plan that will deal with prevention, interdiction and access to treatment. This commission was chaired by AG Mike Hunter and issued a report in January 2018. The report is available here: <http://www.oag.ok.gov/Websites/oag/images/Oklahoma%20Commission%20on%20Opioid%20Abuse%20Final%20Report.pdf> The report recommendations included electronic prescriptions to be issued for Opioids and the creation of the Opioid Fatality Review Board that includes the appointment of a nurse.

Registered nurses are on the front lines of addressing this problem, helping patients to understand the risks and benefits of pain treatment options, including ones that do not involve prescription pain medications. Advance Practice Registered Nurses whose advanced education (including advanced pharmacology) prepares them to assume responsibility and accountability for assessment, diagnosis, and management of patients' problems (including the use and prescription of pharmacologic interventions), play a critical role. Advance Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) could significantly increase access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) if certain restrictions were lifted. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has identified the opioid abuse problem as a high priority and launched an initiative focused on three broad goals: 1) reducing opioid overdoses and overdose-related mortality; 2) decreasing the prevalence of opioid use disorder; and, 3) advancing non-opioid pain management alternatives.

The Oklahoma Nurses Association (ONA) has supported the Governor's efforts to reduce prescription drug abuse in Oklahoma and worked with regulatory entities and licensing boards to encourage prescribers to enroll in the Oklahoma Prescription Monitoring Program.

It is the position of the Oklahoma Nurses Association to continue to work and advocate in the following areas:

- Opioid prescribing practices to reduce opioid use disorders and overdose;
- Expansion in the use of Medication Assisted Treatment to reduce opioid use disorders and overdose, and
- State funding for behavioral health services

Background – See the following:

- ***ANA Issue Brief on The Opioid epidemic: Addressing the growing Drug Overdose Problem***
- ***Oklahoma State Report, 2016 Reducing Prescription Drug Abuse In Oklahoma***

- <http://nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/WorkplaceSafety/Healthy-Work-Environment/Opioid-Epidemic>