



Research and News Worth Repeating

June 15, 2020

Substance Use Research

COVID-19 may be worsening opioid crisis, but states can take action

AMA, 05/28/2020

Not only is COVID-19 a major concern in states across the country, but it is also making it difficult for the most vulnerable who are also facing the epidemic of addiction, with surges in opioid overdoses reported in the states of Illinois, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Ohio.

In response, the American Medical Association (AMA) is advocating that states ease treatment options and adopt new SAMHSA guidelines with more flexibility in prescribing and evaluation of medicines for OUD (opioid use disorder), remove existing barriers for patients with pain, and enact harm-reduction strategies.

The AMA also emphasized the availability and use of naloxone to help save lives.

<https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/opioids/covid-19-may-be-worsening-opioid-crisis-states-can-take-action>

Coronavirus is increasing substance use—and decreasing treatment availability, providers say

CT Mirror, 04/29/2020

Factors related to the COVID-19 response such as social distancing, quarantines, job losses and uncertainty are likely to contribute to an increase of alcohol and drug use. Nationwide, reports show an increased purchasing of alcohol as well as anti-anxiety anti-depression medications.

In Connecticut, residential treatment centers are at or near capacity and many are financially stressed. Many clients are finding it more difficult to access treatment beds. One factor is that COVID-19 is preventing clients from sharing rooms, reducing the number of available beds. Many treatment programs are increasing use of telehealth services but homeless clients or those without cell phones may be left out.

<https://ctmirror.org/2020/04/29/coronavirus-is-increasing-substance-use-and-decreasing-treatment-availability-providers-say/>

A few months of vaping puts health people on brink of oral disease

Medical Xpress, 05/27/2020

Periodontologists at the Ohio State University have found that vaping with e-cigarettes can put people at risk for ailments from gum disease to cancer to periodontitis which can be a risk factor for heart and lung disease.

Surprisingly, the root of the problem lies in bacteria build-up from vaping even without nicotine. Many believe that vaping is less harmful than smoking, but in reality, vaping can quickly lead to a buildup of harmful pathogens in the mouth.

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-months-vaping-healthy-people-brink.html>

The Escalation of the Opioid Epidemic Due to COVID-19 and Resulting Lessons About Treatment Alternatives

American Journal of Managed Care (AJMC), 06/01/2020

The protective measures of shelter-in-place for COVID-19 have decreased access to treatment for addicts and opportunities for distractions from their addictions, making it more difficult to fight their affliction. So much so, the New York Times even labeled the pandemic a national relapse trigger.

The worsening opioid epidemic concurrent to the COVID-19 crisis along with social distancing suggest that treatment modalities that promote building emotional resiliency can help address factors that made patients susceptible to opioid addiction.

<https://www.ajmc.com/journals/issue/2020/2020-vol26-n7/the-escalation-of-the-opioid-epidemic-due-to-covid19-and-resulting-lessons-about-treatment-alternatives>

Social Issues and Substance Use

Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Older Adults at Higher Risk for Substance Use

NYU, 6/2/2020

With June upon us, it is now official Pride Month. It seems timely that researchers at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine found that middle aged adults who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual have higher rates of using certain substances such as cannabis, alcohol, cocaine, and methamphetamine in the past year than those who identify as straight or heterosexual.

These findings are consistent with previous studies and provide insight that could and should be used to aim prevention efforts.

<https://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2020/june/LGB-older-adults-substance-use.html>

Addiction in Isolation: Dr. Sanjay Gupta's Coronavirus Podcast Transcript for April 21

CNN, 4/21/2020

Dr. Sanjay Gupta, Chief Medical Correspondent for CNN, interviewed Dr. Nora Volkow, NIDA (National Institute on Drug Abuse) Director on COVID 19's impact on isolation, withdrawal and the effects of methadone (medication assisted treatment) clinic closings on addicts during an era of social distancing.

In their discussion, Dr. Gupta addresses the challenge of adjusting to a new routine and social support during the isolation of a pandemic while Dr. Volkow focuses on her concerns for the treatment of substance abuse addicts.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/21/health/sanjay-gupta-podcast-transcript-april-21/index.html>

Social Media Addiction

Addiction Center, 4/29/2020

We've heard of alcohol addicts and opioid addiction, but now with the technology era comes social media addiction.

Research has shown that there is a negative impact on mental health through the use of social media. It can make people feel unhappy, isolated, and have low self-esteem.

It's important to recognize social media and its psychological effects, including the potentially addicting dopamine-hits that occur each time one uses the various platforms: Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, etc.

<https://www.addictioncenter.com/drugs/social-media-addiction/>

Big Pharmacy Chains Also Fed the Epidemic, Court Filing Says

NY Times, 5/27/2020

CVS and Walgreens, big pharmacy chains throughout the United States, are being called out by a new court filing for their role in feeding the opioid epidemic.

The retailers have sold millions of pills in tiny communities, offered bonuses for high-volume pharmacist and even worked directly with drug manufacturers to promote opioids as effective.

While they comment on only being involved in prescribing drugs approved by physicians or medical prescribers, that itself may be part of the larger issue of addiction, as many doctors have been prescribing opioids to addicts themselves.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/27/health/opioids-pharmacy-cvs-litigation.html>

Substance Use Solutions

How Technology Can Help Us Navigate the Opioid Epidemic During the Pandemics

Forbes, 6/1/2020

The COVID-19 crisis has shifted focus from fighting the opioid epidemic to the COVID-19 pandemic and several technologies that are being increasingly used for the pandemic could have a significant impact on the opioid crisis.

Use of telehealth technology has exploded in response to the pandemic and the growing need for virtual treatment, where clients can meet with their providers and therapists digitally at regular, scheduled times.

In addition, pharmacies are using technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and radio-frequency identification (RFID) to track and provide an audit trail of controlled substances to help prevent diversion or inappropriate prescribing. Some programs have incorporated prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMP) into existing electronic health record (EHR) technologies to inhibit overprescribing.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2020/06/01/how-technology-can-help-us-navigate-the-opioid-epidemic-during-the-pandemic/#56a5b2254192>

Implementation and evaluation of Missouri's Medication First treatment approach for opioid use disorder in publicly-funded substance use treatment programs

Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 01/2020

Through Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) funding provided in 2017, Missouri's State Targeted Response (STR) implemented a system-level change, "Medication First" approach, which emphasizes increased access to medical treatment for opioid use disorder (OUD) so that clients receive pharmacotherapy as soon as possible and for as long as it is beneficial. Implementation was achieved through state-level structural changes and disseminated to community programs using a multi-pronged approach and has led to greater and timelier access to medication treatment and lower monthly costs.

This response shows potential for drastic and quick change during this public health emergency.

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0740547219301205?casa_token=V2eyWShS0ooAAAAA:gV7Z7Dor5htHAQI89KWNtmCsLD0eDeirLk6LcP1RVeoB4MoZeHsMS1mOnjnBGD9DAWn5eLLqcIk

5 Natural Ways to Boost Your Mental Health

CNN, 6/2/2020

Yoga, breathing, enough exercise, probably terms we don't hear enough on the news media and the benefits are numerous: longer life, reduced stress and better mood.

Researchers have found that just moderate intensity exercise, defined as working out hard enough so you can still talk but can't sing, reduced depression.

Another big stress buster is sleep. Sleep is one of the best things you can do to ease anxiety or stress.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/02/health/natural-ways-to-improve-mental-health-wellness/index.html>