



POSITION STATEMENT

The Occupational Health Nurses (OHNs) Role in Addressing the Opioid Crisis

INTRODUCTION

Opioid medications (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA], CDC, The White House, 2017). Opioids include prescription pain relievers (e.g., hydrocodone, oxycodone, morphine, codeine), synthetic opioids (e.g., fentanyl, tramadol, methadone), and illicit drugs such as heroin (AACN; NIDA). They are highly addictive drugs used to treat moderate to severe pain and have increasingly been used to treat legitimate injuries and health conditions including those occurring in the workplace (CDC). Prescription opioids are often misused, frequently leading to addiction and transition to heroin abuse. The impact of opioid use poses a significant challenge to the workplace environment, employers, and the Occupational Health Nurses (OHNs) who support workplace health and safety. OHNs are essential members of the workplace health and safety team and are ideal agents to actively lead the efforts to reduce the impact of opioids within the workplace and greater community. Their unique education, training, and expertise enable them to collaborate with other agencies using a multifaceted approach to impact opioid morbidity and mortality.

The American Association of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN) joins the American Nurses Association (ANA) and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) in acknowledging the critical role nurses play in addressing prescription drug abuse and addiction, as well as the multifaceted approach necessary to impact this epidemic by reducing opioid morbidity and mortality. Occupational Health Nurses (OHNs) are well-positioned to lead workplace efforts and advocate for the community by ensuring workplaces are safe and support the health of employees, their families, and the businesses they serve.

RATIONALE

Opioids have become the leading cause of injury and death in the United States (US) despite efforts to curb the upward trends in morbidity and mortality (CDC; The White House, 2017). Prescription opioid sales have surged and contribute to abuse, misuse, and diversion, affecting social and economic welfare as well as public health.

CONCLUSION

OHNs are well positioned to lead the efforts in the fight against opioid use, misuse, dependence, and overdose. They are able to provide employee training, deliver education, identify and address opioid use and abuse in the workplace while ensuring confidentiality, and advocate for comprehensive corporate policy making, drug testing, and benefit programs. AAOHN is well positioned to lead the efforts in the fight against opioid use, misuse, dependence, and overdose.

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