

Welcome to the Q-tips for Your Ears podcast series. During each

session, we will highlight a new topic to improve health care

quality and patient outcomes. My name is D Kaiser and my

colleague Tammy Wagner is with me. Today. We are quality

improvement advisors for the Great Plains Quality Innovation

Network. Thanks for taking the time to join us.

Our topic for today is the truth about opioids. Yes. So, Tammy,

how are you? I'm good. How are you? I'm very good. Great. So

this is a very interesting topic, one that we've heard lots

about for sure. And so I think it's important to start out by

just giving us a definition of opioids. Well, opioids or

sometimes called narcotics are medications.

That are prescribed by doctors to treat persistent or severe

pain. OK, so how do they work? Well, opioids attached to

proteins called opioid receptors that are on your nerve cells.

And they are in the brain. Spinal cord in your gut or

stomach and other parts of the body. And when this happens, the

opioids block the pain messages sent from the body through the

spinal cord and to the brain.

While they can be very effective

to relieve pain, they also carry

a lot of risks. These medications can be highly

addictive.

OK, So what are the side effects of opioids? So some side effects

include sleepiness, Constipation and nausea. They can also cause

shallow breathing, a slowed heart rate and at times, loss of

consciousness. Sometimes when a person has been on opioids for a

long time and then they suddenly stopped taking them, the person

can also experience jittery nerves or insomnia. So that

reminds me, somebody that.

Could just be on street drugs? Absolutely. I mean, I think they

affect the same receptors in the brain. Alright, so here's the

big one and one we hear about in the news and in the medical

world, what is opioid misuse? Sure. This is when a person

takes the medicine in a way other than prescribed taking

someone else's prescription or taking the medicine to get high.

Uh, addiction to an opioid is possible, and it happens far too

often. Addiction is a condition in which something that started

as a pleasurable vent now feels like something you cannot live

without. Again, opioids are highly addictive, in large part

because they activate that powerful reward center in the brain.

OK. So they're prescribed for a short time usually.

Most of the time, they're prescribed for a short time.

There are still people out there that have been on opioids for

long periods of time for chronic pain. They're, you know, the CDC

or Center for Disease Control just came out with new

prescribing guidelines. But that always takes some time for, you

know, doctors, your doctors to know and understand.

Ah, so why is it important that we know about opioid misuse?

Well, more than two million Americans misuse opioids,

according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. More

than 90 Americans die every day from opioid overdose.

Overdose deaths involving opioids increased from a little

over 70,000 to almost 81,000 between 2020 and 2021, and we

don't even know yet what the increase from 2021 to 2022 will

be. Opioids are a high risk drug that not only can cause

addiction and death, but have many adverse drug events or non

fatal they're called non fatal overdoses.

Wow was what I can say to that

to do in Americans misusing

opioids. That's a lot of people.
Yes. So can you explain who

opioids affect it can't they can
affect anyone who takes an

opioid. They are at risk of
developing an addiction. And it

depends on personal history and
length of time the opioids are

there on opioids. And that all
plays a role. It's impossible to

predict who's vulnerable to the
dependence on these drugs. They

can affect the families.

Of those who have had an opioid
adverse drug event or death, and

I'm sure people have heard the
horror stories of when young

people have been found,
unresponsive and even die by

people, by their parents or
other loved ones, and later

learned that that young person
took.

Opioids that were still in their
cupboards and medicine chests

and and or grandparents or a
friends.

That's scary. That is, we know.
Oh, go ahead. No, I was just

gonna say I'm just thinking
about my own cupboard. There are

opioids in there and.

That's something I'm sure you'll
talk about about. Yes,

absolutely.

Safe when you do have a

prescription and maybe you don't

take all that are prescribed.

Yeah, there's a lot of things

you can do and we will talk
about that. But we know the

names of those famous people who
have died from a drug overdose

and, you know, just a couple or
Michael Jackson, Whitney

Houston. He's Ledger. Many
opioid deaths occurred due to

drug interactions or mixing
medications with other drugs,

alcohol or over the counter
medications. These might play a

role in drug related deaths.

For example, the consumption of
multiple drugs such as opioids

in combination with like a
sedative or sleeping pills,

hypnotics or alcohol have and
can lead to unintentional

overdose, which is caused by
severely depressing your

breathing, or that respiratory
system.

So when were people usually
prescribed opioids? Will usually

they are used by people with
chronic headaches, backaches by

patients recovering from surgery
or experiencing severe pain

associated with cancer.

Umm, some or those who have been
seriously injured in falls, auto

accidents or other incidents
from some frequently used

opioids are codeine, fentanyl,
hydrocodone, oxycodone,
oxymorphone and morphine.
Opioids are also prescribed by

dentists for post dental
procedures. New studies have

shown that opioids don't work
well for chronic pain. New

opioid prescribing guidelines
like I said, I've just been

released by the.

Center for Disease Control that
make recommendations to

physicians and providers in
outpatient settings.

Uh, of the how and when to
prescribe an opioid. And then

the duration or time of person
should have an opioid. I'd

talked about the dental
procedures and.

I remember a few years ago, you
know, the dentist. If you had

your wisdom teeth pulled or root
canal, they would send you with

the prescription for like 90
pills. Yes. And. And that's a

significant amount to have if
you don't take them all, maybe

it'll only take a few and then
you have those just hanging in

your cupboard. Definitely.
That's a scary thing. Yeah. So

how can community members and
the community at large help

with?

We'll be right misuse. You have
never take opioids in greater

amounts or more often than prescribed. Let your doctor know

about any side effects or concerns that you're having. If

you are taking opioids, avoid taking opioids if you can.

Instead try other medications such as acetaminophen, brand

name would be Tylenol or ibuprofen Aleve those kinds of

things for pain. Don't share your prescription opioids. Ever.

Store in a secure place out of reach of others, including

children, family, friends and visitors.

I know many stories.

Of people who are addicted to opioids, who?

Travel to people they know that I've had surgery or have had

babies. They go to the bathroom. They look for your medications

and they take some or all.

Dispose of unused opioids at the end of your treatment. You need

to find a take back program D, find a take back program every

day can be a takeback day. That's right. That's right. And

the pharmacy, they have pharmacy, mail back programs, or

just learn about other ways to dispose of them. And did you

know that you can ask the pharmacist for smaller amounts

of your prescription opioids? I

think that's something that a

lot of people don't realize.

Yeah, if the.

Doctors say prescribed 90 pills.
You who can request when you go

to your pharmacy to fill it,
that you only receive maybe

1520? Thirty of them, and then
the rest will still be there if

you need them, you can go back
and get more instead of taking

all 90 home with you not using
and having to dispose of them.

You can learn about signs of
opioid overdose, such as small

pupils falling asleep or loss of
consciousness. Slow, weak or no

breathing.

Choking or gurgle sounds limp,
body cold, clammy skin,

discolored skin.

And then learn about it's called
naloxone. And if you should

carry this life saving drug with
you, naloxone can quickly

restore normal breathing to a
person who's breathing has

slowed or stopped as a result of
overdosing on an opioid

medication or an at some other
drugs.

Ask for naloxone if you're being
prescribed an opioid. If you

have a family member, have them
understand where it's located

and how to use it. Naloxone is a
safe medicine that can be given

to people of all ages, and even
if given to someone who has not

taken an opioid, it's not going
to hurt them, can only save a

person's life. So talk to your
pharmacist about options in your

community. Yeah. And and being
offered the naloxone.

From personal experience.

My mother had a joint
replacement and when I went to

pick up her pain medication for
it, the pharmacist said, you

know, sign here and I'll give
you some Narcan, which can, Yep,

naloxone, naloxone. And I said
to her, oh, no, we don't need.

We don't need that. But it's not
an issue. And she was very good

in saying it doesn't matter.
That is not why I want you to

have it. Anyone can have.

An overdose to an opioid,
especially if they're not used

to taking it, and you'll need to
have this in your house. Yeah.

And so great advice from that
first night. And I, to be honest

with you, I did not know that
they were were, you know, giving

that out. Yeah. Just anytime
they give out an opioid, they're

asking that's we wanna give you
some narc. Great news. Yeah, it

is good. So, yeah, that
pharmacist is just.

A plethora of information and a
great person to help with that

care coordination. And yes, making sure you have what you

need. Well, if you think about with pharmacy being a specialty,

you know you go to a doctor that deals with heart conditions. You

go to a doctor if you have cancer and oncologist.

When you're taking medicines, there are so many medications

out there. The pharmacist is that specialty for medications,

right? And I know a majority of the the pharmacists that are out

there now, you know, they have their doctorates. Ohh, you're a

Doctor of pharmacy. Something. So relating them to like your

doctor for the different specialties or even your

internist or family practice. You need to think of your

pharmacist as just another doctor in your healthcare team.

Yeah. And ask them question and ask them questions that consult.

Yes. They want to answer questions.

Yes, OK. So where can people learn more about opioids and

their misuse? Well, you can always go to our website at

greatplainsqin.org and it's under the initiatives tab and

improving patient safety.

You can also go to thecdc.gov and that is under opioids. So

yeah. Yeah, great information.
Thank you, Tammy and I,

unfortunately, I think this is
gonna be something we're gonna

be working on for a long time.
Ohh. I'm so sad about that. But

I I think you're right. Yeah.
All right. Well, we hope you

enjoyed today's Q-tips for your
ear session. We look forward to

connecting with you next time.
Have a great day.