

A History of Opioids

By Hap Hansen

Two weeks ago, January 1, 2018, on the subject of 'Why?' I wrote: "Why do some doctors continue prescribing opioids that are making some patients become addicted and even die?" The answer, according to some experts, is that those few physicians may have the inability to separate pain from addiction.

Here's a brief history of opioids: Opium, the beginning, was discovered 6,000 years ago. Hippocrates used opium to treat nausea. In 1803, a German chemist purified opium's most active ingredient and called it morphium. In 1827, a pharmaceutical company, Merck, began mass producing morphine opium, and soon after, many became morphine addicts. In 1895, a German doctor/chemist working for company called Bayer, took some of the ingredients of morphine and used it on patients. It also became addictive. Bayer named the drug for its heroic properties, heroin. Morphine addicts became heroin addicts. In the early 1900's, scientists again chemically modified a component of opium. They called it oxycodone. Soon, chemically changed oxycodone became OxyContin. Products derived directly from the opium poppy are called opiates; morphine is an opiate. Chemical modifications of opiates are called opioids; heroin and oxycodone are opioids.

During the past year, the Center for Disease Control issued a series of restrictive guidelines to help prevent addiction. They were:

1. Prescribe opioids not to exceed a three-day supply.
2. Quantities may not exceed a three-day supply except for long-term pain, then only a 7-day supply may be prescribed.
3. A one month supply may be prescribed only when there is significant improvement.

It is obvious that even the restrictive guidelines are confusing.

Today, the United States, which contains five percent of the world's population, uses 80 percent of the world's painkillers.

Other prescription names for opioids include; Percodan, Percocet, Vicodin, codeine, Fentanyl and Dilaudid. Some of us may have taken one or more of these drugs. I close this article with the same question I opened with: "Why do some physicians continue prescribing opioids that are making some patients become addicted and even die?"