Opiate Addiction Pandemic

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**Abstract**

*Opioids are classes of drugs such as fentanyl and pain relievers that are prescribed by medical officers for use by patients as a remedy to certain health complications. However, this class of drugs also includes some that are illegal such as heroine. Whether legal or illegal, these drugs are chemically related and have almost similar effects on the users. While some opioids such as painkillers are good and beneficial when used according to a prescription for a short time, it is important to note that a prolonged use of these medicines leads to serious health effects among the users. However, one of the main features of these drugs is that they cause massive euphoria besides the pain relief among the users; these drugs are always bound to be used by the persons involved. In that regard, the patients would always want to use larger quantities of the substances than as prescribed by the doctors. Subsequently, these substances would not be consumed due to their medicinal value but due to the euphoric effects that they have on the users. Addiction is one of the major issues that arise from this kind of usage. Soon after an individual starts to depend on the substances, they would also want to graduate to heavier dosages than what they currently consume, and that will tempt them to change the types of opioids that they use. Consequently, the addicts would resort to the use of heroin which has a higher content of the chemical that causes this problem for them to get maximum satisfaction and thrill. In America, the abuse of opioids is growing thanks to the actions and decisions of pharmaceutical companies rapidly. Statistics indicate that 11% of Americans use opioids non-medically and that has caused serious health concerns. In that regard, this paper asserts that the pharmaceutical industry is to blame for the terrific increase in the misuse of opioids in the country and global stage. The study demonstrates the manner in which the pharmaceutical industry has contributed to this problem. Besides, it goes ahead to prove the way in which individuals who depend on opioids gradually adopt the use of illegal drugs such as heroine. In the long run, this paper will suggest the various ways in which the pharmaceutical industry can be involved to take an active role towards the reduction of the dependence on opioids and subsequent use of prohibited drugs in America.*

**Background information**

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has always provided the guidelines to be used in the prescription of the opioids in the United States and other countries. However, in spite of these regulations, evidence suggests that there have been tremendous increases in the number of people who use the medicines. In most cases, opioids have been used as remedies to the challenges of various pains that individuals may go through. While they are beneficial to the body, the misuse of these problems is likely to cause massive health concerns that may at times lead to death. Instructively, opioids have a way of working up the human system in such a way that it generates some level of excitement among the users. The drug reacts with the nerve receptors in the brain and brain hence causing individuals to develop some level of dependency in the event of prolonged usage (Jones, 2013).

Opioid addiction is one of the debates that have dominated the public space in the past few years. It appears that there is quite a huge dilemma on how to approach the whole matter. While at one end they are helpful in providing remedies to various pains that individuals go through, it is not lost on keen observers that the substances have the potential of damaging vital body organs which may kill people. During most of these engagements, the pharmaceutical companies have been blamed for contributing significantly to this issue. However, the companies have always defended themselves that they have a duty to provide medical care to those in need. While that argument is plausible, the fact is that in most cases, the organizations have failed to adhere to the strict guidelines which regulate the circumstances under which these medications should be issued and the dosages which should be prescribed in particular cases.

It is this failure to strictly follow the guidelines that have contributed massively to the entire problem in the American society and indeed in the global arena. A review in one of the major medical journals recently stated that most countries are struggling to address the issues regarding prescription of opioid drugs in the communities. It has become evident that most pharmaceutical institutions do not follow the guidelines that are provided in deciding whether to issue opioids as medications to patients. For instance, a person may decide to prescribe opioids even if there is another less lethal drug that can equally address the medical challenge.

In the United States of America alone, it is estimated that 11% of drug users do not use them for the purposes for which they were prescribed (Dowell et al, 2016). Most of these drugs include opioids which in the long run contribute to massive health complications among users. Some of the issues involved include the overdose of the drugs as well as the escalation of the desire to use potent types of opioids. These include heroin and other narcotics. Interestingly, the group of people that have been found to be adversely misusing the drugs is those people under the age of twenty years of old.

Regarding these challenges, this paper demonstrates that the pharmaceutical industry has contributed enormously to the increase in the use of opioids among Americans. It provides an elaborate description of the loopholes that have been exploited by the players in this industry to provide medicines inappropriately to patients. The restructuring of the operations in the sector is crucial to the fight against drug abuse in America. The government and all the relevant agencies must put the best foot forward in trying to find remedies to the problem. If it is left unaddressed, the problem may threaten the moral fabrics of the nation.

**Literature Review**

Vrecko, 2016, in an article ‘Risky bodies, Drugs, and Biopolitics: On the pharmaceutical governance of addiction and other ‘diseases of risk' the pharmaceutical industry plays a central role in the promotion of the addiction to drugs such as opioids. So worrying has the problem been that it has been described as an epidemic. To understand the stakes involved, it is necessary to see the figures at play. In 2010, the Fortune magazine published a report which suggested that there were a total of 240 million opioid drugs registered in that year alone. That volume of drugs is sufficient to be used by the United States of America. In the same period, the paper says that the pharmaceutical industry players generated a whopping $ 11 billion in the sale of opioid drugs alone. That amount of money is huge. That partially explains the reason why these companies may not be interested in any debates that are aimed at regulating the use of opioids in America. The profit margins are so big that the companies would do anything on their way to maintain the ‘consumption' level.

Thus, when the use of opioids is described as an epidemic, the figures may as well support it. Since the early 90's, the pharmaceutical industry players have intensified their push to introduce more of these substances both in the local and international market. However, the fact that these companies would push beyond any ethical barrier to achieve whatever they want is disturbing. Ethically, it is inappropriate for any institution to give products that are harmful to the users (Han et al, 2015). While these establishments understand the effects of using these drugs, they have continued to pump billions of dollars in the manufacturing of these substances in anticipation of decent returns. The fact that these industries care about their benefits over the well-being of the consumers makes them a very wrong group of business persons.

The extent of this unethical conduct is also witnessed by the fact that they are willing to disregard the rules and regulations in their pursuit of profits. The Center for Disease Control has put in place measures and policies that are supposed to guide the prescription of the opioid medicines (Alexander, 2017). However, these companies have found ways of circumventing these provisions to meet their desires. The fact that the pharmaceutical companies are disregarding the regulations that are aimed at regulating the use of opioids to cure some illnesses is a clear manifestation that they do not care about the interests of the patients.

A report by the National Institute on Drug Abuse states that as of 2016, over 2 million Americans were suffering from drug related addiction. Additionally, the same projections indicate that the numbers are likely to swell in the coming years. While making money is important and contributes to the general development of the country, it is also evident that the push and pull that goes on among these companies are contributing significantly to the increase in opioid dependency among most Americans especially the youths (Dimasi et al, 2016). Even when there are regulations that are aimed at restricting the introduction of the products in the market, these companies would always find ways to make sure that their products reach the market. In America, the following are some of the institutions that have always been at the forefront in dictating the events that take place in the pharmaceutical industry. They include;

* Purdue Pharma
* Abbott Labs
* Johnson & Johnson
* Pfizer
* Novartis
* Covidien
* Watson Pharmaceuticals
* Endo Pharmaceuticals

Through the efforts of these institutions and many others, Americans have found an opportunity to increase their consumption of these drugs. The use has moved away from the medical purposes for which they were created and have instead become a way of stimulating the body. Besides, it is the responsibility of these companies to make sure that they provide only the right quantities of the substances. However, in this case, the pharmaceutical companies are producing more of the product so that they can satisfy the non-medical demands of the people. It is necessary for the companies to be considerate and make sure that they produce only those amounts of substances that are in respect to the medical needs of the patients.

A seven-year-long pitting the attorney general of Kentucky against Purdue Pharma is another demonstration of the unethical conduct on the side of the pharmaceutical companies. Some time back, Purdue Pharma distributed pieces of information regarding an opioid, OxyContin. In their messages, the company indicated that the drug could be used on a broad range of medical conditions. Based on this information, physicians and patients used this information to prescribe a wide variety of infections. Later on, it turned out that this piece of information was flawed. It was a deliberate attempt by the company to increase the sales of the products by unfair means. In the end, 12 parties went to court and sought compensation for the losses that they had undergone (Hwang et al, 2015).

The actions of Pharma Purdue are not isolated. Many other organizations are using the same skewed marketing strategies that have been adopted to sell these products. A lot of these companies are deceiving the customers on the types of infections that can be cured by the medicines. However, on close examination, it appears that most of the information that these people provide are lopsided and do not provide the perfect situation and composition of the drugs. It is unethical for a company to provide inaccurate or false information regarding particular drugs deliberately. Additionally, it is a criminal offense to provide false information to the public willfully. That partially explains the reasons why the attorney general of Kentucky pursued Pharma Purdue regarding the information that they provided regarding concerning OxyContin.

Ohio is the leading state in America where the use of opioids is rampant. In 2016, 20% of the population was depending on opioids for medical purposes or otherwise. In 2016, there were more than nine hundred million doses that were prescribed to be used by different persons. In the same state, a lot of doctors spend their time struggling to fight overdoses while the coroner's office is also storing a lot of bodies. Most of the fatalities that result from opioids are due to the issue of overdose (Manchikanti& Singh, 2008). When individuals start using these drugs, the chemical components of the drugs react with the bodies and the nerves in such a manner that they will demand more of the substances. That would gradually lead to addiction.

Since addiction means increased purchases, the pharmaceutical companies would have no problems with this trend. In the recent past, legal officers have been grappling with the issue of whether to consider the pharmaceutical companies legally liable when they fail to disclose that the substances that they provide may lead to addiction. In the past, state attorneys have entered into legal battles with tobacco manufacturing companies with the aim of making them pay for the medical expenses that arise because the companies made contributions to the health problems.

As the crisis of addiction and the subsequent health complications rise, is it possible to discuss the problem without giving attention to the pharmaceutical companies that make the productions? Hardly. In many occasions, some of these enterprises have argued that the introduction of these drugs into the market have been done without their explicit knowledge. It is inconceivable that such drugs can leave the premises of the producers without their direct authority. Available evidence suggests that the companies willfully flout the federal regulations and introduce the medicines in the market without concern over the complications that they bring to the users.

Another issue that has been mentioned roundly to be contributing to the problem is the influence that these companies have over the policy making processes in the country. Since these businesses have tremendous resources and have highly placed sources in the country's political food chain, the companies are always are positioned in such a manner that they can influence the making of policies. As a result, in the event where they smell that there is a particular regulation, policy or law that is likely to affect their commercial activities, they will always do whatever they can to interfere with the process (Light et al, 2013). The primary interest of these people is to advance their business interests at all costs.

Pharmaceutical firms have always argued that each is responsible for his own life. In that regard, they claim that they do not take responsibility for the adverse health issues that might be experienced by the users of the drugs. Besides, they indicate that people who always die as a result of the overdoses do not follow the prescriptions that have been provided for them. Additionally, they obtain the drugs from black market where the pharmaceutical companies do not have control. In the long run, the sufferings of the patients are not in any way related to the activities of the enterprises. In all fairness, it is not possible for the companies to watch over the manner in which various characters use the drugs. However, it is believed that they have a role to play and that they should bear the burden of the challenges that arise from the use of these substances, whether for medical purposes or otherwise.

Opioids have a broad range of effects on the human body which are rarely mentioned by the pharmaceutical companies. It is incredibly necessary that these companies disclose all the issues that the users might have to conform to their use of the substances. Now, the primary function of the opioids is that they act as central nervous system depressants. In this regard, they slow down the nerve signal transmissions, a process that slows down the transmission of pain sensations to the brain. That process involves the process of production of neurotransmitter chemicals from the brain. While these drugs have little or no effects when taken moderately and inconsistency with the prescriptions, it is evident that an overdose or wrong use of these drugs is likely to cause problems to the users (Lundh et al, 2015).

Pharmaceutical companies have in the recent taken very aggressive marketing strategy towards the provision of these products in the market. The kind of this aggressiveness attracts patients to call for opioids when indeed there are better pain killers that they can use to address their health issues (Larsson, 2014). Additionally, these companies have influenced even professionals when they sponsor education courses for medical professionals on the various benefits that are obtained from the use of opioid-based treatments on the treatment of particular illnesses. Additionally, these companies have employed lobby groups to advocate for the use of opioids as a mechanism of addressing various health issues.

From the preceding, it is notable that the use of opioids exposes individuals to the risk of addiction which may, in the long run, lead to the consumption of other drugs such as heroine among various users. While pharmaceutical companies have tried to insulate themselves from any blame as a result of the health concerns that arise from the use of these drugs, it noticeable that they play a significant role in the escalation of the whole matter.

**Materials and methods**

The study was designed to find out the possibility of using opioids for medical purposes may potentially lead to the collapse into the s-use of other harmful substances such as heroine. The goal of the study was to determine the possibility of opiate users starting to engage in the consumption of other potentially hazardous materials such as heroine.

*The respondents*

The study included 200 individuals who had previously been on opiate addiction but are currently on treatment. The research was conducted among people who had voluntarily agreed to participate. The study was carried out with direct permission of the administration of the institution in which the individuals were based. From the respondents, there was an experimental group consisting of 100 persons. These were opiate users who had had a history of the use slipping into the use of other hard drugs such as heroine.

On The other side, there was another group of 100 respondents who did not have any history of trying to engage in other forms of opioids other than those that have been prescribed for medical purposes. The criterion that was used to include the individuals in the opioid addiction was based on the ICD-10 criteria. At the same time, the researchers examined the participants with the aim of exploring some of the medical conditions that the persons may have been suffering from. Some of the medical conditions that the study paid close attention to included the organic and symptomatic mental disorders. It is necessary to point out that any evidence of mental illness disqualifies a person from research since an individual in that state of mind cannot make decisions. As a result, the study ensured that individuals that were suffering from any forms of mental illness were not included in the research. Other conditions that the survey considered and excluded from the undertaking were schizophrenia, personality disorders, mood disorders and mental issues.

*The methods*

The study tested the tendency by an individual to use opioid drugs for purposes for which they were never prescribed. It was aimed at getting to know the factors that compelled these people to adopt these practices. In the long run, it was expected that the results obtained would help in determining whether the continued used influenced these people to use the drugs or other external factors played some roles in making the persons dependent on the substances. Since these participants were not known to the researcher personally, it was assumed that the data that was collected was objective. To make the process devoid of subjectivity and inducement, the participants were not paid any amounts of money to give their story. Besides, to assure the respondents that the results would be confidential, they were presented with codes for identification which were then entered into Excel files for record purposes.

*The questionnaire*

A questionnaire was developed to address the unique demands of this research. All the questions were designed objectively with the sole purpose of getting to know the reasons that compelled some of the opioid users to use the drugs in a manner that was not medically intended. The following are some of the issues that were contained in the questionnaire;

* Social demographic data
* The data on psychotic heredity
* There was request for data on addiction characteristics

Finally, the respondents were provided with personality inventory forms which they were supposed to fill objectively. The researcher then independently and objectively analyzed so as to determine the personality traits of the respondents. It is important to note that personality traits play an important role to play in the addiction pattern of most individuals. The results of these evaluations were then tabled as indicated below.

**Results, discussions, conclusions and recommendations**

Graph 2; the relationship between employment and opioid addiction

Graph 1; the relationship between social factors and education and opioid addiction

Graph 3; the relationship between psychiatric heredity and opioid addiction

Graph 4; the addiction features of the participants (average)

From the above results, the following facts are deducible; firstly, concerning social factors, whether a person is living with their partners, or their spouses and their children, it emerges that those who misuse and those who do not abuse opioids do not show any significant differences. Concerning employment, however, it appears that there is a significant difference. It is clear that those individuals who are not employed are prone to misuse these substances as opposed to the people who work. Additionally, it became apparent, that the individual who was divorced and those that were unmarried were prone to misuse the opioids than those who were in stable relationships. However, it was not very clear whether the presence of children or absence of the same had any significance in the misuse of the substances.

An examination of the psychiatric analysis was conducted concerning heredity and disorders. Now, about family members, there was little evidence to suggest any level of relationship with misuse of the opioids. However, the psychiatric disorders indicated that there is a connection between the tendency to abuse these drugs and the mental position of the persons. Drug addiction and subsequent misuse of the substances were found to be more common among the individuals who had some issues with mental illnesses.

Finally, it was also evident that there was a tendency to indulge in the use of heroin among persons who were misusing the drugs. While opioids are useful in the treatment of various illnesses, it is evident that a continued use of these substances leads to the desire by the users to indulge in the consumption of harmful substances such as heroine.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

Opioid addiction is one of the debates that have dominated the public space in the past few years. It appears that there is quite a huge dilemma on how to approach the whole matter. While at one end they are helpful in providing remedies to various pains that individuals go through, it is not lost on keen observers that the substances have the potential of damaging vital body organs which may kill people. During most of these engagements, the pharmaceutical companies have been blamed for contributing significantly to this issue. However, societies have always defended themselves that they have a duty to provide medical care to those in need. While that argument is plausible, the fact is that in most cases, the organizations have failed to adhere to the strict guidelines which regulate the circumstances under which these medications should be issued and the dosages which should be prescribed in particular cases.

There is a large body of evidence which implies that the pharmaceutical industry plays a huge role in the promotion of the problems that are related to addiction and use of opioid-related drugs such as heroine. The research has demonstrated that there are a lot of factors that would predispose individuals to the use to dependency. Some of these include the levels of education, levels of income and the mental states of the users. Although there are suggestions by the pharmaceutical companies that they do not control the manner in which people use these drugs, it is evident that they have a role to play in the escalation of the problem in the societies (Schatman&Darnall, 2014).

Through the efforts of these institutions and many others, Americans have found an opportunity to increase their consumption of these drugs. The use has moved away from the medical purposes for which they were created and have instead become a way of stimulating the body. Besides, it is the responsibility of these companies to make sure that they provide only the right quantities of the substances. However, in this case, the pharmaceutical companies are producing more of the product so that they can satisfy the non-medical demands of the people. It is necessary for the companies to be considerate and make sure that they produce only those amounts of substances that are in respect to the medical needs of the patients.

From the discussions and the findings, it is necessary to point out the task that is ahead is monumental. There is a need to save the society from sliding down the dangerous path of addiction. A country that is addicted to various drugs is capable of achieving any meaningful social, economic and political growth. From the preceding, it is apparent that there are a lot of parties that are responsible for this menace. There are various governmental authorities, the medical officers, and the pharmaceutical companies. While it is evident that there are a lot of other players who have contributed significantly to the severe increase in the problems, it is apparent that the pharmaceutical companies have a huge role in the stimulation of the utilization of the products in the country.

One of the ways through which these companies act in furtherance of the problems is their influence in the making of policies that control the pharmaceutical sector. As the paper has demonstrated quite clearly, the pharmaceutical companies are quite powerful due to their immense financial resources and connection in the various corridors of power. The combination of these factors has placed them at a prime position in which they can influence the policy formulation structures to tilt the regulations in their favor. In light of these factors, it is necessary to come up with a raft of measures that can improve the situation and rid the country of the problems occasioned by the use of opioids.

*Recommendations*

In light of these facts, it is incredibly necessary for the nation to adopt the necessary measures to respond to the challenges that these activities pose to the communities. Firstly, policies should be made which will compel these organizations to be responsible for their business activities. They must make sure that these products are administered according to the provisions of competent authorities such as the Center for Disease Control. One of the ways of installing this kind of responsibility is to come up with laws which will make the organizations culpable for any health problems that will arise in the event of misuse of any particular drug. While it is true that the country does have policies that can actually deal with the problem, the pharmaceutical companies have in the recent years infiltrated the system and made sure that the rules and regulations are not strong enough to dissuade them from conducting the suspicious business activities.

The primary use of opioids is to relieve patients suffering from chronic pains. The paper does not deny that opioids are highly effective when used as pain relievers. However, it is important to make restrictions on the situations under which these medications may be utilized. In that regard, this study recommends that opioids should be provided by only qualified physicians after a careful analysis of the circumstances of the patients. There should be a prohibition against an unregulated use of the opioids especially in the absence of medical officers. The idea is to make sure that the substances are used purely for health reasons.

Finally, one of the reasons cited by the pharmaceutical companies is that some drugs find their way into the markets illegally. The government has a responsibility of sealing all the loopholes to make sure that all the avenues that are used to introduce illicit opioids into the market are sealed. The penalties imposed by such practices should be so massive that they discourage any attempts by individuals or companies to use unconventional means to bring illegal drugs into the markets. In that manner, the consumption of opioids in the United States would be reduced drastically.

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