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Report Shows Another 10 Percent Decline in Opioid Prescribing in South Dakota in 2019

SIOUX FALLS – July 21, 2020 — The American Medical Association’s [Opioid Task Force report](#) released today shows a dramatic increase in fatalities involving illicit opioids, stimulants (e.g., methamphetamine), heroin and cocaine and a similarly dramatic drop in the use of prescription opioids.

The changing landscape of the opioid epidemic poses challenges for the health care system, which must pivot to treat people in danger of overdose from all drugs. The SDSMA and AMA are calling on stakeholders – including health insurers and policymakers – to remove barriers to evidence-based care. Red tape and misguided policies are grave dangers to pain patients and those with an opioid-use disorder.

“High rates of opioid diversion, addiction and abuse have led to an increasing number of overdoses and deaths. The problem of opioid addiction has become more complicated as those who are addicted turn to heroin, methamphetamine and other drugs that are now easier to obtain,” said SDSMA President Benjamin C. Aaker, MD.

Physicians have reduced opioid prescribing and increased the prescribing of naloxone, a medication designed to rapidly reverse opioid overdose. **In South Dakota, physicians and other health care professionals reduced opioid prescribing by 10 percent in 2019 compared to 2018. From 2014-2019, cumulative opioid prescribing in South Dakota is down 36.5 percent.**

The SDSMA has been at the forefront on this issue by providing physicians with evidence-based guidelines for prescribing opioids to both effectively treat pain and minimize patient risk:

- Through a special committee on pain management and prescription drug abuse, the SDSMA has developed two whitepapers, *Opiate Analgesics for Chronic Non-Cancer Pain*, and *Effective Management of Acute Pain* to serve as a resource for physicians and prescribers.
- Physicians advocates worked with South Dakota legislators to pass a good Samaritan law that protects individuals from liability who aid a victim in an overdose emergency.

- Physicians worked with state legislators to pass a law that allows access to naloxone for family members of individuals with substance use disorder. It can be administered to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.
- Physicians also have continued to educate themselves on safe prescribing, pain management and recognizing signs of addiction. The SDSMA has worked with the state to offer certification workshops on medication assisted therapy (MAT) for prescribers.

While saddened by the fact that prescription opioids were responsible for 23 deaths in South Dakota in 2019, they remain an important tool for relieving moderate to severe pain arising from a wide range of medical conditions, disease states and medical procedures when used appropriately.

“Prescription opioids remains a top concern for the SDSMA,” said Dr. Aaker. “If it weren’t for naloxone, there likely would be additional deaths. It is past time for policymakers, health insurers, pharmacy chains and pharmacy benefit managers to remove barriers to evidence-based care for patients with pain and those with a substance use disorder.”

Despite SDSMA and patient advocacy, there is more work to be done to include removing prior authorization requirements on substance use disorders’ services or medications and ensuring those with substance use disorder have access to treatment options and support networks.

Specific actions that policymakers can take include enforcing mental health and substance use disorder parity laws and increasing access to non-opioid pain care.

The SDSMA serves physicians, residents and medical students who are dedicated to the health of South Dakotans. The mission of the SDSMA is to promote the art and science of medicine, protect and improve the health of the public, and advocate for the well-being of physicians and patients and the best environment for physicians to advance quality health care. Learn more about the SDSMA at www.sdsma.org.

Created in 2014, the AMA Opioid Task Force is comprised of more than 25 national, state, specialty and other medical associations to coordinate efforts within organized medicine to help end the nation’s overdose epidemic. Additional information on the AMA Opioid Task Force is available at www.end-overdose-epidemic.org