

# Pharmacist's Focus



## THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

The opioid epidemic that has swept this nation in the last decade is a matter to not take lightly. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, more than 115 people die from an opioid overdose every single day.<sup>1</sup> These overdoses occur on opioid drugs that are both illegally obtained and legally prescribed.<sup>2</sup> These medications include:

Heroin
Morphine
Methadone
Buprenorphine
Hydrocodone
Oxycodone

## HOW PHARMACY PRACTICE CAN HELP

In 46 states, patients can now buy Naloxone (Narcan, Evzio) from their local pharmacy without a prescription written by their doctor.<sup>3</sup> Naloxone is a competitive opioid antagonist that is given in the event of an opioid overdose. This means that if an opioid drug is taken by a patient and then naloxone is given, the naloxone will competitively compete with the opioid to take over the receptor that the opioid was acting on.<sup>4</sup> A significant aspect of Naloxone is that it does not have any abuse potential. It cannot intoxicate a patient, and there is no effect on the body if it is administered and the person does not actually have any opioids in their system.<sup>7</sup>

Naloxone is approved for the treatment of opioid toxicity; for instance, when a person is not breathing on their own. Besides absent breathing, other signs of an opioid overdose include: loss of consciousness, awake but unable to talk,

breathing is shallow, vomiting, body is limp, and/or pulse is slow or nonexistent.<sup>8</sup> Naloxone can be given intravenously, intramuscularly, subcutaneously, and intranasally.<sup>6,9</sup> The goal of Naloxone is to help the person become able to breathe on their own, as well as stop the other effects of the opioid.<sup>6</sup> The dose of Naloxone is 0.4 to 2 mg initially and then you may repeat the dose every 2 to 3 minutes as needed for a response.<sup>9</sup>

The side effects of Naloxone are minimal. If they do occur, they typically include opioid withdrawal effects (anxiety, agitation, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain).<sup>6</sup> In rare cases, pulmonary edema can occur.<sup>6,9</sup>

In regard to special populations, Naloxone can precipitate opioid withdrawal in a baby if administered to a pregnant woman. However, Naloxone should never be withheld from a pregnant woman if it is clearly indicated.<sup>9</sup>

## **THE ROLE OF DISPENSARY OF HOPE AND OUR NETWORK**

Dispensary of Hope hopes to be able to receive naloxone from our partnered manufacturers in the future. Once we secure a partner to source Naloxone, it would be available for all 150+ sites to receive per their specific state guidelines and regulations. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), low-income populations are at higher risk for misusing prescription drugs.<sup>10</sup> Dispensary of Hope can make a significant impact in this population members who are without insurance by helping patients obtain free Naloxone.

## **References**