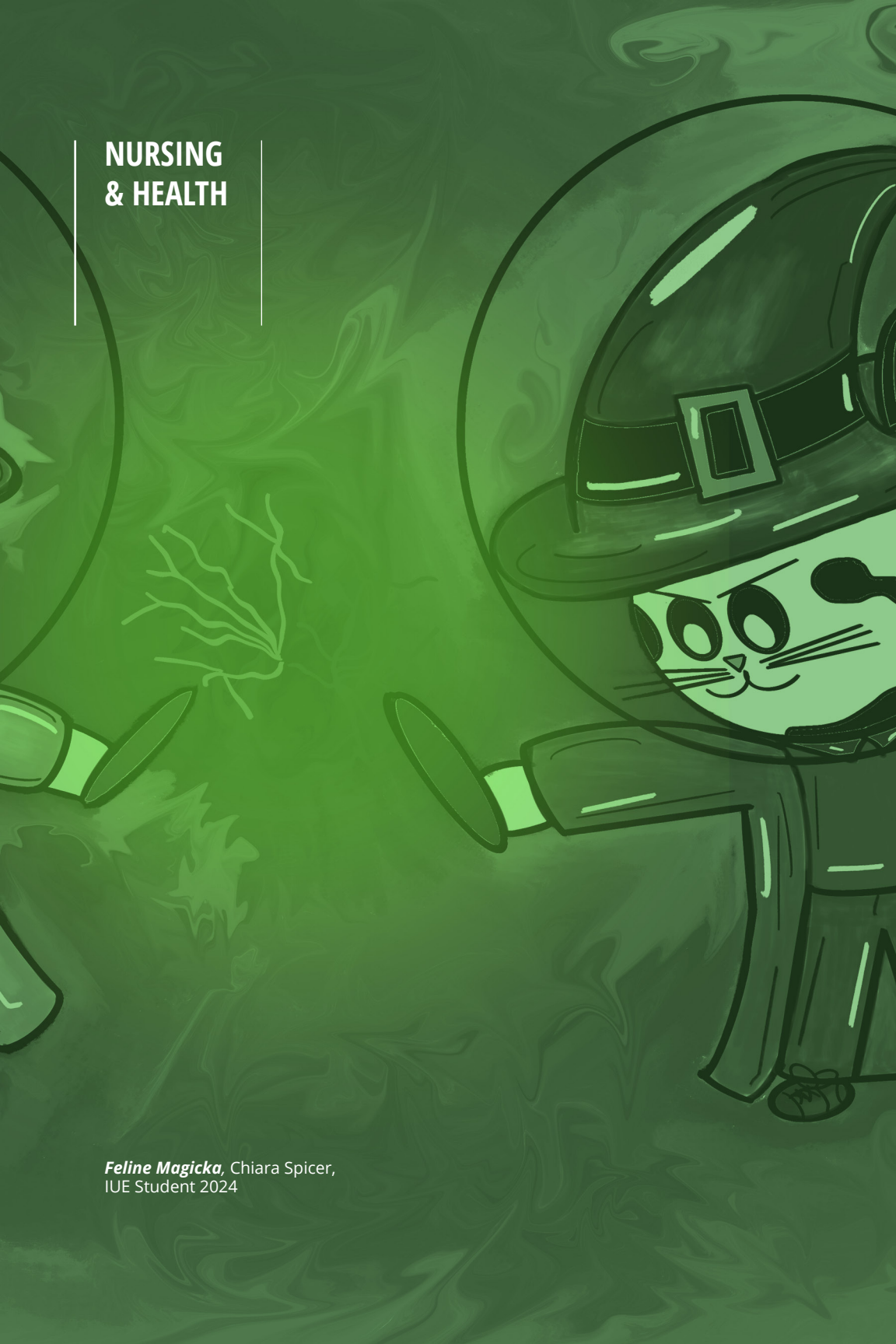


NURSING
& HEALTH



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IUE Student 2024

INTRODUCTION: WHY DOES THE NURSING PROFESSION BASE OUR PRACTICE ON EVIDENCE?

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Course faculty (for the following two articles)

Junior year nursing students in the R375 Nursing Research and evidence-based practice course developed skills in retrieving and appraising current evidence that is relevant for today's nursing research priorities. Students were challenged to apply their writing and research abilities into the development of a literature review. The literature review confirmed the nursing research priority, described the current evidence for practice and provided implications and recommendations based upon science and credible sources. The students demonstrated their scholarly abilities by tying current evidence to real world nursing issues, provided recommendations for changes to practice using sound clinical judgement with consideration to patient preferences. ■

THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

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Ema Nunley**

Abstract

Opioid misuse is a world-wide epidemic. This article is a literature review to educate health care workers and communities on opioid misuse. Under review and discussion is the prevalence of opioid addiction in America and the effects of the drug on its communities. This also review also discusses information on the over prescription of opioids leading to chronic use and reliance. Nurses have responsibilities to educate and decrease the prevalence of opioid addiction.

Keywords: addiction, crisis, treatment, prescription abuse, chronic users, reliance, world-wide epidemic, opioids

Opioids are a strong class of medications indicated for pain management. According to Wyoming's department of health the most abused opioids are morphine, heroin, vicodin, dilaudid, and fentanyl (Opioids and other drugs, 2023). The current unlawful purpose of these medications is as an abused, recreational drugs. Opioids are often overused in medical settings and contribute to the overall addiction rates in the US. For example, "In October 2021...Jurors concluded that CVS, Walgreens, and Walmart dispensed enormous quantities of prescription opioids" (Opioid Epidemic, 2022). According to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control), 645,000 people have died from opioid overdose since 1999. This epidemic of increased opioid overdoses has been detrimental to communities across the country (Opioid

Data Analysis and Resources, 2023). This epidemic has resulted in an increase in crime, poverty, and diseases caused by IV drug usage (HIV and hepatitis). Poor health in individuals can lead to job loss and possibly poverty. The overprescription of opioids has caused an epidemic that is negatively impacting communities across the nation. We as nurses not only have the responsibility of educating clients on opioid misuse, but also the power to slowly change how opioids affect our country.

According to the journal of AAOS, “one person dies every 11 minutes from an opioid overdose” (Slater and Beverley, 2022). The number of opioid users and deaths have severely increased over the past 25 years, COVID-19 in the U.S. worsened these statistics, due to stress and anxiety from the pandemic. Contrary to common belief opioid misuse is more common in rural communities, instead of urban areas. The NIH (National Institutes of Health) found that the states with the most opioid misuse includes “Kentucky, West Virginia, Alaska, and Oklahoma” (Keyes et.al 2014). This is believed to be because of the over-use of opioid prescriptions, due to the increase in chronic pain in these areas. The main reason why these numbers have increased is unknown. Nurses in these rural communities need to be aware of the over usage of opioids, to try to decrease it as much as they can with their patients.

Not only does the use of opioids cause harm to the individuals abusing the drug, but this occurrence causes harm to our communities too. According to John Hopkins Medicine, opioids can cause drowsiness, euphoria, nausea, vomiting, and potential respiratory depression (Opioids, 2023). The combination of these side effects can cause harmful patient outcomes, and potentially could lead to death. The continued use of opioids may lead to opioid withdrawal. Some signs of opioid withdrawal are abdominal pain, anxiety, diarrhea, tachycardia, mydriasis, and vomiting (Prescribing opioids for pain: guidelines from the centers for disease control and prevention, 2023).

Not only does the use of opioids impact our bodies, but misuse also affects our communities. Noted from the United States Department of Agriculture, “the use of opioids can affect our quality of life, disrupts economic opportunities, and can hinder rural prosperity” (Opioid Misuse in Rural America, n.d.). Not only do our communities suffer economically, but the use of opioids can lead to increased crime and violence rates, because of the altered mental status addiction can cause. According to a PubMed study, “...heavy opioid users committed crimes significantly more frequently than did moderate opioid users, non-opioid polydrug users, cannabis users or alcohol users” (Hammersley et. al 1989). Understanding how nurses can prevent the use of opioids can lead to better community safety and individual health.

The overprescription of opioids is extremely popular in this generation, especially the United States. Medical doctors often give strong pain medication due to the patient’s complaint of pain, but when they do this, they do not adequately assess the patient’s pain or offer alternative medications or non-pharmacological pain relievers. Also, when they prescribe opioids, proper teaching and education of the medication is not offered, so patients are unaware of the harmful side effects. According to the article “The Opioid Epidemic: A Review of the Contributing Factors, Negative Consequences, and Best Practices”, a survey was done in 2006 that revealed that hospitals “... encouraged the liberal use of opioids in treating patients’ pain, where, despite the risks involved, a physician may be encouraged to issue a generous amount of a particular opiate-based painkiller as long as it means that patient satisfaction may increase” (Judd, et al., 2023). We must encourage our medical doctors to reassess our patients before giving opioids and educate our patients, as nurses, on these strong painkillers.

With the current crisis surrounding opioid use and increases in opioid-related deaths in the US, there is a clear need for alternative

treatment of chronic pain” (Urits et al., 2020). The forefront of the opioid epidemic spans from the overprescription of opioids to manage pain. This has led to a nationwide epidemic that affects communities, households, and lives. Nurses can combat this epidemic. First, nurses will advocate for the patients in pain. Through contemporary therapies and developed policies nurses will teach individuals pain management.

Through education about the harm of opioids and the risk for addiction, nurses can become mindful when administering opiates to patients and begin to question provider orders. It is important for nurses to educate themselves on alternative ways to treat patients with pain, so we don't add to the ever-growing list of people affected by opioid addiction. Knowledge of contemporary therapies such as acupuncture, Tai Chi, and chiropractic care, have been proven to help reduce pain and combat the need for intense opioid treatment (Urits et al., 2020). Nurses can advocate for policies to be implemented that confront the use of opioids as pain management within their hospitals.

In conclusion, an epidemic of opioid misuse and addiction has been very present in many communities throughout the country. A medication that was intended to help treat pain has been doing the opposite and causing pain to many families and different groups of people. The misuse of opioids has increased crime, violence, and overdose related deaths. This is due in part to the over prescription of opioids throughout healthcare facilities and pharmacies. Education toward healthcare members and patients about overprescription, opioid addiction, signs of opioid withdrawal, signs of opioid overdose, and harmful effects of opioids. Nurses advocating for change are pertinent to solving this widespread problem. It is the duty of health care workers to educate and work towards solving the opioid epidemic one patient at a time. ■

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