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Kimberly Topper  
Food and Drug Administration, CDER  
Advisors and Consultants Staff, HFD-21  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Ms. Topper:

There has been a lot of recent inaccurate media hysteria about an increase in the abuse of OxyContin®. There have also been some isolated reports of death from overdoses with OxyContin® (usually mixed with alcohol and/or other drugs and sometimes erroneously reported and not involving OxyContin® at all).

The exact statistics are difficult to gather, but it is clear that untreated or under-treated chronic pain is one of the most, if not the most, common cause of suicide in the forty and over age group. Before I started practicing medical pain management, I had four pain-related suicides in my practice in my patients or their near relatives. If this is multiplied nation-wide, the ratio of suicides prevented by OxyContin® and other long-acting opioids to deaths from overdose is probably about a hundred to one. This is not even considering the quality-of-life value of pain control.

Obviously, every effort needs to be made to limit the illegal use of opioids, but anything that would restrict the availability of these medicines to chronic pain patients would do more harm than good.

This is best illustrated by a true story from my practice:

Phil (alias) is a barrel-chested, bearded man in his mid-forties who looks like a logger. When he came to my office the first time he had had three back surgeries and had been through two expensive Labor and Industries pain clinics. In the second one he had been taught yoga and sent home to cope with his pain using what he had learned. His claim was closed, and he had been at home for three years suffering from severe pain and rarely leaving the house. After listening to his history and performing a physical examination, I started to get out my pain management compliance forms.

"Does this mean you are going to help me?" Phil asked.

"Yes, you are the kind of person God made this medicine for," I replied.

This big man started to cry and in choked tones said, "I've got a thirty-ought-six at home. It's got a bullet in the chamber. I've already written the suicide notes. I've figured out where I can go to make sure that my wife or kids won't be the ones to find my body. If you were just like the other doctors and told me that I had to learn to live with my pain, tomorrow morning, as soon as my wife left for work, I was going to use that bullet."

A month later it was Phil's wife in my office crying and thanking me for giving her her husband back.

Now Phil is still not working, but he can attend his son's little league games, he goes to church with the family—he has a life, and his children do not have the scar on their life of a father who committed suicide.

That's what medical pain management is all about.

Medical pain management saves lives. One of the best medical pain management medications is OxyContin®. Therefore, OxyContin® saves lives!

Sincerely,

Keith L. Hindman, DO,

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