

A CLOSER LOOK 13.1: Opioid Analgesic Addiction Epidemic

The number of people addicted to opioid analgesics such as dilaudid, methadone, morphine, and oral prescription opioid analgesics such as oxycodone and hydrocodone is becoming an epidemic. This is a serious global problem, and it is estimated that 33 million users abuse opiates and prescription opiates worldwide.¹ Unintentional overdose deaths have quadrupled in the United States since 1999. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 15,000 people died from prescription opioid overdoses in 2015 (one-half of all U.S. opioid overdose deaths).² Babies are being born daily to mothers who abused these drugs during pregnancy and who now are equally addicted. The withdrawal process on these infants is difficult for all involved. This epidemic is placing a huge financial and social burden on society to provide care for the addicts as well as the families of these addicts.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Prescription Opioid Overdose Data. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/overdose.html>. Accessed 24 May, 2017.

² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. World Drug Report 2016. http://www.unodc.org/doc/wdr2016/WORLD_DRUG_REPORT_2016_web.pdf. Accessed 24 May, 2017.



CRITICAL THINKING

What other nondrug methods, aside from meditation, can be used to decrease pain?

MEDICATIONS TO TREAT ANXIETY, INSOMNIA, SEDATION, AND SEIZURES

The limbic system of the brain is integral to such emotions as love, fear, and anger, as well as being important to our memory and level of alertness. The connections in this part of the brain allow the limbic system to control and mediate these emotions. If the structures in this system are not operating optimally, difficulty with anxiety, sleeplessness, alertness, or seizures may occur. Medications help to relieve anxiety, promote sleep, increase alertness, or help stop seizures.

Anxiolytic Medications

Anxiety may be an uneasy feeling of discomfort or tension, or it may be an apprehension that originates from anticipating danger. Anxiety disorders are characterized by the recurrences of such reactions to the extent they interfere with a person's ability to function. Types of anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phobias, and many more. With anxiety disorders, the source of discomfort or danger is often unknown or unrecognized. Phobias are exaggerations of normal anxieties (heights, animals), and others are based on previous experiences (e.g., being trapped in an elevator).

Anxiolytic medications reduce the intensity of these fears, dangers, and/or tension that a patient may be experiencing. They can be taken routinely or only when the patient feels increasing anxiety. These drugs work in the limbic system of the brain by depressing the subcortical levels of the CNS and have a calming effect. This effect can range from mild sedation to coma, depending on the medication and dose used. CNS depressants comprise a type of anxiolytic used to treat anxiety and restlessness. The two main categories of CNS depressants are benzodiazepines and barbiturates. Benzodiazepines include lorazepam (Ativan), diazepam (Valium), and alprazolam (Xanax), and are used for anxiety, seizures, alcohol withdrawal symptoms, and muscle relaxation. They can also be used to reduce anxiety before