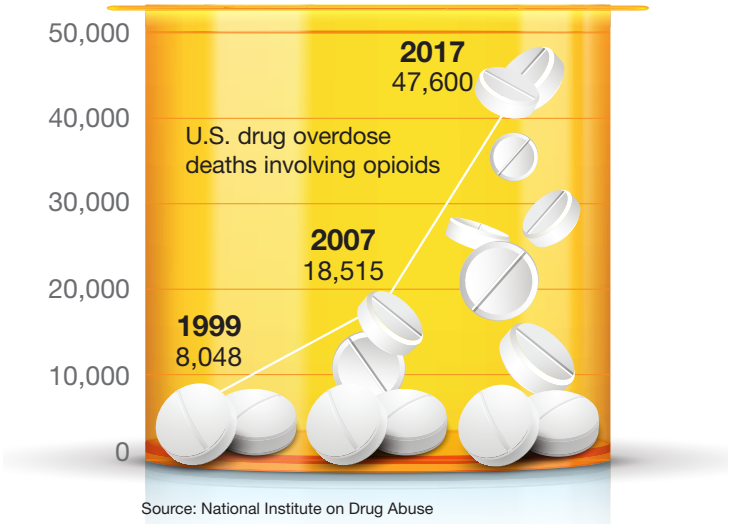
SFM
The Work Comp Experts®

Helping to prevent opioid addiction

The opioid epidemic

Drug overdose deaths were up more than 300% in 2017 from 1999, fueled by opioid misuse.



Source: National Institute on Drug Abuse

Opioid facts

- **Using opioids long term** can increase sensitivity to pain, requiring higher doses for the same level of pain relief
- A government-funded study showed that opioid painkillers are **no more effective for chronic pain** than common drugs such as acetaminophen and naproxen
- **21-29% of patients** prescribed opioids for chronic pain **misuse them,** and 8-12% develop opioid use disorder

Source: Chicago Tribune, National Institute on Drug Abuse

Opioid use among injured workers, by the numbers

- **44% of workers' compensation claims** had at least one prescription for opioids in 2016, down from 55% in 2012.

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- **300%, increase in risk** for drug-related death for women who experienced a work injury severe enough to keep them home from work for at least a week. For men, it's a 29% increase.

Source: American Journal of industrial Medicine

Timeline

1995
FDA approves OxyContin, which is marketed as nonaddictive treatment for chronic pain

1999-2014
Sales of prescription opioids nearly quadruple

2015
U.S. average life expectancy declines, attributed to the increase in drug overdose deaths

2016
CDC releases new recommendations urging doctors to carefully assess the risks before prescribing opioids

2017
Opioid epidemic declared a public health emergency

Drug overdoses surpass vehicle crashes as the leading cause of accidental deaths

National opioid prescribing rate falls to 58.7 prescriptions per 100 persons, its lowest in more than 10 years

2019
Actuaries estimate the opioid epidemic has cost the U.S. economy at least $631 billion from 2015-2018

Sources: U.S. News & World Report, American Academy of Family Physicians, National Public Radio, Society of Actuaries, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Protecting injured workers from opioid addiction

Our strategy

- **Monitoring:** Our pharmacy benefits manager alerts us if an injured worker is prescribed opioid painkillers, and we monitor the situation.
- **Early intervention:** We intervene when we see injured workers are still taking opioid painkillers three weeks after surgeries. We find our best chance of success is to prevent them from getting to 90 days of use.
- **Working with physicians:** We send letters to the doctors treating injured workers who are taking high doses of opioid painkillers. We also provide them weaning schedules to help injured workers reduce or quit using the drugs over time. Injured workers also receive copies of the letters.
- **Supporting alternatives:** There are many ways to treat chronic pain that don't put injured workers at risk of addiction, such as exercise, and medications like Tylenol, aspirin and ibuprofen.
- **Commitment:** We have a nurse on staff focused solely on prescription drugs.

Our results, by the numbers

- **86% reduction**
  in injured workers taking a higher-than-recommended dosage of opioid painkillers long term since 2015

- **88% of injured workers**
  taking high doses of opioids in 2015 have been weaned off completely, or are taking lower doses

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