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AAPM Statement on National Decline in Opioid Prescribing

A statement from the American Academy of Pain Medicine

Data released by IQVIA, a health care consulting company that regularly gathers prescribing data from pharmacies across the country, documenting a 22-percent decrease in opioid prescriptions nationally between 2013 and 2017 clearly shows that prescribers have been more judicious in prescribing opioids to their patients. It also reinforces a key tenant of pain medicine: there are alternative medication and non-medication modalities for treating pain, and opioids are only one of many treatment options that healthcare providers can utilize to help treat their patients and improve their quality of life.

When juxtaposed with the staggering increase in opioid-related overdoses and deaths in the same period, a 22 percent decrease in opioid prescribing is striking for other reasons as well. Together, these statistics shine a bright light on the fact that many Americans are increasingly likely to obtain illicitly manufactured fentanyl, heroin, and even more deadly contaminated heroin and fentanyl, leading to overdoses and tragic deaths and less likely as part of a clinician-prescribed treatment plan for patients with chronic pain. Clearly, simply writing fewer opioid prescriptions may help to decrease availability for misuse and abuse of prescription opioids and other adverse events, but will not be the single answer to our growing national opioid epidemic.

Further, these IQVIA statistics underscore the importance of differentiating addiction from chronic pain disorders. In contrast to the sharp decline of opioid prescriptions, opioid related deaths are on the continual rise. People with pain and people suffering with addictive disorders need access to respective pharmacologic, behavioral, and other treatment modalities. As members of AAPM, we remain dedicated to helping to improve the function and quality of life for people in pain and facilitating the identification and referral of patients with addiction to professional providers.

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About AAPM

The American Academy of Pain Medicine is the premier medical association for pain physicians and their treatment teams with some 2,000 members. Now in its 35th year of service, the Academy's mission is to advance and promote the full spectrum of multidisciplinary pain care, education, advocacy, and research to improve function and quality of life for people in pain. Information is available on the Academy's website at painmed.org.

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