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The Opioid Crisis – A Critical Threat Across The U.S. Why Health Services Research Matters.

Opioid use disorders currently have a heightened focus across the U.S., due to the epidemic of prescription drug addiction, heroin use, overdoses, and new opioid threats such as the rapid increase in fentanyl use, with its accompanying consequences. This focus ranges from the White House and Surgeon General to states and communities. The 21st Century Cures Act recently passed includes \$1 billion for states to address the opioid crisis. The reasons to examine opioid use go beyond current public interest, as they have major consequences – including those at a societal level – if untreated. Societal consequences include public health (e.g., overdoses, infectious diseases), criminal activities, unemployment, and effects on children such as neonatal abstinence syndrome or out-of-home placements; each of these has associated costs for communities and states.

With a constantly changing landscape, intense public focus, and interventions that to-date have been inadequately implemented, there is urgent need for a targeted look at this critical threat to our health and community well-being. Health services research can take a systems perspective to evaluate need, access to care, quality of care, interventions, and organizational responses to the opioid crisis.

This panel will address the opioid crisis, both as a critical threat and, given the constant evolution, an emerging issue. Sponsored by the Brandeis-Harvard NIDA Center to Improve the System Performance of Substance Use Disorders (P30 DA035772) and the Brandeis Opioid Policy Research Collaborative, and chaired by Constance Horgan, Sc.D., of Brandeis University, the panel will provide a framework for why the opioid crisis remains an urgent issue, discuss the emerging threat of fentanyl, and offer services research views into the roles for states and health plans in addressing the opioid crisis.

- Andrew Kolodny, M.D., Brandeis University, will provide an overview of the prescription opioid and heroin crisis. He will discuss factors that led to the rise in opioid-related morbidity and mortality and the relationship between prescription opioids, heroin and fentanyl. He will also review efforts by government stakeholders and health care systems to respond to this urgent public health problem.
- Richard Frank, Ph.D., Harvard Medical School (co-author Harold Pollack, Ph.D., University of Chicago), will discuss fentanyl misuse and abuse, as an alarming policy and health challenge. He will discuss the nuances of why fentanyl is different and even more challenging than other opioids, and present potential health care, harm reduction and policy options.
- Peter Kreiner, Ph.D., Brandeis University, will discuss state prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs) as a key tool for the prescription opioid crisis. Many state PDMPs use patient risk indicator thresholds, such as use of multiple providers or high average daily opioid dosage, to trigger electronic alerts to prescribers about these patients. However, little is known about patient behavior, in the absence of alerts, before or after exceeding such a threshold. Further, he will discuss geographic patterns in prescription opioid-, heroin-, and fentanyl-related overdose death rates in one state from 2011 - 2015.
- Sharon Reif, Ph.D., Brandeis University, will discuss how health plans manage access to and utilization of treatment for opioid use disorders, particularly methadone and buprenorphine, as one way of addressing the opioid crisis. Findings show that despite the promise of expanded access to opioid use disorder treatment before and after implementation of federal parity and

healthcare reform, improved health plan coverage for treatment of opioid use disorders, while essential, is not sufficient to address the opioid crisis.

Discussion will focus on additional emergent issues, treatments, and policy responses. The panel will conclude with ideas for a health services research agenda to contribute to key solutions and an evidence base for reducing opioid use, opioid use disorders, overdoses and other consequences.

Summary:

This panel will address the opioid crisis as a critical threat and an emerging issue. It will provide a framework for the urgency of the crisis, discuss the emerging threat of fentanyl, offer services research views into roles for states and health plans, and propose a health services research agenda.