

Nurses' role in combating the opioid crisis in Canada

Nearly 2,500 Canadians died from opioid-related overdoses in 2016, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada. This represents a national death rate of 8.8 per 100,000 people—deaths that the Minister of Health indicated were preventable. The misuse of and addiction to illicit and prescription opioids is a growing public health crisis in Canada. Combating the opioid crisis in Canada will require significant depth and breadth of intersectoral and interprofessional collaboration, with nurses playing a major role.

In February 2017, CASN hosted three in-person regional workshops for registered nurses and nurse practitioners as part of a broader project, funded by Health Canada, on *Development and Mobilization of Appropriate Prescriber Practice Competencies for Controlled Drugs and Substances into Nurse Practitioner and Registered Nurse Education Programs*.

The workshops were held in Halifax, Toronto, and Calgary (February 7, 10, and 14, respectively) and were attended by a total of 80 participants with representation from 10 provinces. Workshop participants had the opportunity to engage with expert speakers to understand this growing epidemic, to investigate the perspectives on legal, ethical, and harm reduction strategies, and to share ideas of how nurses and nursing can make a difference. Workshop activities included a world café where participants engaged in brainstorming sessions to identify a) how nurses can contribute to the prevention of opioid misuse and abuse when providing nursing care, b) how nurses can contribute to the treatment of opioid misuse and abuse, and c) how nursing as a profession can contribute to a reduction of the opioid crisis.

The following is a thematic analysis of the solutions put forward in the brainstorming activities. There were 10 major actions that were identified from the brainstorming work, and specific points are included under each.

Recommended Actions for Nurses to Address the Opioid Crisis in Canada

- 1) *Optimizing assessment skills related to substance use and misuse*
- 2) *Educating individual clients, families, and the public regarding substance use and misuse*
- 3) *Optimizing pain management skills*
- 4) *Supporting PEOL clients' and families' use of opioids to control pain*
- 5) *Encouraging best practices in harm reduction strategies*
- 6) *Referring to community resources*
- 7) *Responding to overdose*
- 8) *Adopting a trauma-informed approach*
- 9) *Destigmatizing addiction*
- 10) *Collaborating interprofessionally and intersectorally to address the crisis*

Recommended Actions for Nurses to Address the Opioid Crisis in Canada

- 1) Optimizing assessment skills related to substance use and misuse
 - Establish whether opioids are being used
 - Explore why opioids are being used
 - Assess risk of substance misuse
 - Identify indicators of substance use and misuse
 - Identify signs and symptoms of withdrawal
 - Improve medication reconciliation
- 2) Educating individual clients, families, and the public regarding substance use and misuse
 - Provide appropriate information to clients who are prescribed opioids (e.g., clients being discharged following surgery)
 - Provide discharge information to postsurgical clients prescribed opioids post-surgery
 - Provide counseling, information, and support to families of persons abusing substances
 - Provide education programs to populations at risk for abusing prescribed or illicit substances (e.g., schools)
- 3) Optimizing pain management skills
 - Provide evidence-based knowledge related to pain and pain management to clients with acute or chronic pain
 - Apply knowledge related to pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches to promote comfort and pain relief
- 4) Supporting PEOL clients' and families' use of opioids to control pain
 - Teach and support the clients and families appropriate opioid use to control pain
 - Teach and support the PEOL family in safe disposal of narcotics in the home following client's death
- 5) Encouraging best practices in harm reduction strategies
 - Promote harm reduction practices associated with routes of use, substances used, and social use practices
 - Possess knowledge and skills to support safe injections
 - Possess knowledge and skills to support needle exchange programs
- 6) Referring to community resources
 - Identify need for community resources related to substance misuse
 - Apply knowledge of existing community resources related to substance misuse and abuse
- 7) Responding to overdose
 - Recognize overdose
 - Provide emergency assistance
 - Provide naloxone administration
- 8) Adopting a trauma-informed approach
 - Apply an understanding of the role of trauma in substance misuse
 - Work with substance abusers to promote resilience
- 9) Destigmatizing addiction
 - Address stigma related to substance misuse
 - Advocate for substance users
- 10) Collaborating interprofessionally and intersectorally to address the crisis
 - Apply an understanding of the roles other professionals related to substance use & misuse
 - Work with other professionals to prevent or address substance misuse