Trends in chronic opioid and medically-assisted treatment prescribing in U.S. community health centers, 2006-2014

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TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Community health center practitioners

ABSTRACT: Background: In the past two decades, the U.S. has seen a significant rise in opioid analgesic use, and related abuse, addiction and death. There is a strong correlation between opioid prescribing rates and overdose deaths in the U.S, and nearly half of opioid prescriptions filled by patients are prescribed by primary care providers (PCPs). Understanding prescribing patterns among PCPs and at-risk patient groups will inform interventions aimed at reducing opioid use and increasing the use of medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid substance use disorder (OSUD).

Methods: The Community Health Applied Research Network (CHARN) analyzed opioid and MAT prescribing patterns for patients 18 years or older between 2006 and 2013 in 15 community health centers across the U.S. We classified patients as long-term opioid users (LTOU) if they had received 4 or more opioid prescriptions in 90-365 days. Patients receiving buprenorphine (alone or with naloxone) or naltrexone were considered MAT users. Prevalences of opioid and MAT users were plotted by year for age, gender and racial/ethnic groups.

Results: Overall, of 593,630 patients analyzed, 16.9% met criteria for LTOU. Prescribing patterns were similar between males and females. Among patients with a diagnosis of OSUD, 23% had a prescription for MAT.

OBJECTIVE(S): Describe trends in opioid and MAT prescribing patterns among safety-net patient groups in community health centers between 2006 and 2014.

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