Opioid addiction and treatment

Addiction is a chronic disease, just like hypertension and diabetes. Since 1999, the rate of overdose deaths involving opioids (including prescription opioid pain relievers and heroin) nearly quadrupled. 78 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose. Deaths from prescription opioids—drugs like oxycodone, hydrocodone, and methadone—have also quadrupled since 1999 and now account for the number one cause of accidental death, surpassing motor vehicle accidents. In 1996, the American Pain Society (APS) introduced the phrase “pain as the 5th vital sign”. In 2001, the Joint Commission rolled out its Pain Management Standards, which helped grow the idea of pain as a “fifth vital sign.” It required healthcare providers to ask every patient about their pain, given the perception at the time was that pain was undertreated. On December 12, 1995, the Food and Drug Administration approved the opioid analgesic OxyContin. It was advertised as a safer, less addictive opiate analgesic because of its longer half life. It hit the market in 1996. In its first year, OxyContin accounted for $45 million in sales reaching $3.1 billion by 2010. Since that time, the U.S. has experienced a surge in opioid prescriptions -- and, subsequently, an increase in overdoses and deaths tied to these painkillers. Because of this crisis and a shortage of addiction specialists, ABMS approved a new Addiction Medicine multi-specialty subspecialty for Preventive Medicine and a certificate exam open to 24 medical specialties. American Medical Association vowed to advocate for a removal of “pain as the fifth vital sign” from all patient assessments and surveys. States are working at local levels to help physicians treat opioid addicted patients in their own practices.

Biography

Rose Berkun is an Assistant Professor of Anesthesiology at Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences in Buffalo, New York. She is a President Elect for New York State Society of Anesthesiologists. She is an owner and President of Northeast Ambulatory Anesthesia, PLLC, a company specializing in Office Based Anesthesia services. She is a graduate of SUNY at Buffalo School of Medicine as well as SUNY at Buffalo Anesthesiology Residency program. She is a Medical Director of Anesthesia services for several medical groups in Buffalo, including Aesthetic Associates Center, Dent Neurologic Institute and Buffalo Cancer Center. She is actively involved in several societies, including the American Medical Association, American Society of Anesthesiology and New York State Society of Anesthesiologists.