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## **Amplifying Life**

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### The Opioid Crisis

Opioids - A term heard often but many are still wondering what it is. Opioids are a class of drugs that include powerful prescription pain relievers – such as oxycodone, codeine, morphine, and fentanyl – and the illegal drug heroin. There are many others and are known by commercial names, brand names, and street names. The term Opioids refers to all natural, synthetic, or semi-synthetic drugs derived from the opium poppy plant.

Drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the United States, of which a majority is due to the prescription and illegal opioids. Seven drug related deaths occur every hour in the United States. Opioids work by binding opioid receptors in your body to relieve pain and alter the pleasure center of the brain. In addition to the risk of abuse, addiction, and overdose, prescription opioids can have numerous side effects, even when taken as directed: abnormal pain sensitivity, sleepiness and dizziness, nausea, vomiting and dry mouth, severe constipation, physical dependence, psychological dependence, tolerance, and respiratory depression (slow or shallow breathing). All of which can lead to life threatening symptoms.

Many opioids come in a prescription form and can be legally prescribed by a medical professional to treat moderate to severe pain. One of the biggest concerns is that approximately 30% of individuals who are prescribed opioids for chronic pain report misusing them.

To avoid misuse and overdose:

- 1) Do not take more medication than what is prescribed.
- 2) Do not take other people's prescriptions.
- 3) Do not mix opioids with alcohol, anti-anxiety medication, muscle relaxants, sleep aids, and other opioids.
- 4) Be proactive in addressing pain. Consider exercise, therapy, or over-the-counter pain medications.

Please take a proactive role in helping to fight against the opioid crisis. The first step in our community was a Drug Take-Back Day last Saturday. Medications at home should be stored in a location that cannot be reached and is out of site for children and visitors. It is highly recommended to store medications in a lock box or locked medicine cabinet. Once you are finished with any prescription dispose of it promptly and safely. You can follow any disposal instructions on the bottle, a medication disposal bag can be picked up from most pharmacies, or place in a sealed bag with used kitty litter. You can also good “FDA flush list” for an up-to-date list of medications you can safely flush down the toilet.

If you or someone who know is abusing opioids, seek help NOW. If you suspect someone is experiencing an overdose, call 911. Please feel free to contact me for additional resources. Shandi Andres, Flint Hills Extension District, 501 W Main, Council Grove, KS 66846. (620) 767-5136 or [sdandres@ksu.edu](mailto:sdandres@ksu.edu)