The College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP) believes all individuals deserve access to affordable, meaningful healthcare coverage. While approaches to prevention, intervention, and treatment have improved, gaps in the health system remain for those with opioid use disorder (OUD) and other substance use disorders (SUDs). Psychiatric pharmacists are experts qualified to work as part of an integrated healthcare team to improve access to treatment and medication-related outcomes for patients with SUDs. The following describes the challenges the country faces in addressing the opioid epidemic and SUDs and the role psychiatric pharmacists can play in optimizing and expanding treatment options.

Substance Use Disorders and Mental Health

According to the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), an estimated 20.1 million people aged 12 or older suffered from a substance use disorder (SUD), with opioid use accounting for approximately 2.1 million. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that more than 64,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2016 – 42,000 from opioids – 175 each day. Despite these staggering figures, less than 4 million received treatment for their SUD and fewer received treatment at a specialty facility.

Often forgotten, many of these struggling with addiction are also affected by a co-occurring mental illness. The NSDUH found approximately 10.8 million adults aged 18 or older had some form of co-occurring mental illness with their SUD. Still, the treatment for either of these conditions continues to fall far short of what is needed to prevent the daily tragedies we see now.

Psychiatric Pharmacists Are Underutilized in Treating Opioid and Substance Use Disorders

Today, pharmacists graduate with a Doctor of Pharmacy degree requiring six to eight years of higher education. Clinical pharmacists have training in direct patient care management and more medication-related training than any other healthcare professional. Psychiatric pharmacists, as a specialty within clinical pharmacy, are residency-trained and board certified mental healthcare practitioners who have specialized training in providing direct patient care and treatment for psychiatric disorders including OUD and other SUDs.

Given the challenges our country faces in addressing the opioid epidemic and SUDs, it is tragic that the expertise of psychiatric pharmacists continues to be severely underutilized and misunderstood by many in the practice of healthcare.

Challenges to Fully Utilizing Psychiatric Pharmacists

Federal limitations on reimbursement and medication prescribing authority currently impede psychiatric pharmacists’ integration into the healthcare team. As a result, their scope of practice varies significantly across states and throughout certain healthcare systems including the Veterans Affairs Administration (VA). When included as an integrated member of the healthcare team, psychiatric pharmacists can:

- Provide direct patient care, including prescriptive authority and medication management for a full range of patients’ conditions and medications, ensuring the optimization of all medications including prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, and supplements to ensure that they are appropriate, effective, safe, and can be taken as intended.
- Provide consultations and drug information to their team members as well as medication education for the patient and the patient’s family or caregivers.
• Promote medication adherence and reinforce primary prevention, health promotion, and lifestyle modification.

Policymakers and healthcare providers alike are grappling with how to safely and effectively expand medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for OUD and SUDs. For this reason, patients’ access to MAT is often delayed or restricted. Psychiatric pharmacists’ specialized training in SUDs and deep understanding of MAT make them an ideal part of the healthcare team. In addition to the above, psychiatric pharmacists can:

• Advise providers and waivered prescribers on the selection of appropriate MAT treatments including buprenorphine and naltrexone.
• Assist with buprenorphine inductions and dosing adjustments and monitor patient response to reduce adverse events including diversion.
• Assist with medication management for co-morbid psychiatric and substance use disorders.

The benefits of psychiatric pharmacists’ role in providing MAT services to patients with SUDs are many. Psychiatric pharmacists’ involvement improves patient adherence and success with Buprenorphine treatment; and reduces per patient dosing of Buprenorphine through improved medication management, monitoring and titration. Ultimately, the integrated care team optimizes outcomes, reduces workload for individual providers – increasing access to services – and reduces overall costs of care.

**Recommendations**

The President’s Commission on Combatting Drug Addiction and the Opioid Epidemic (“The Commission”) recommended policymakers remove reimbursement and policy barriers to SUDs treatment including those that limit access to forms of FDA-approved medication-assisted treatment, counseling, first-fail protocols and frequent prior authorizations. The Commission along with numerous other federal agencies, also recognized the need to increase the psychiatric workforce.

Despite the significant value and expertise provided by psychiatric pharmacists in the prevention and treatment of SUDs, federal policies remain a barrier to practice within integrated healthcare teams. We support the Commission’s recommendations and ask policymakers to work with CPNP on the following policies to expand patient access to treatment for SUDs.

• Recognize clinical pharmacists as providers and allow Medicare to reimburse pharmacists for providing Part B services, which would otherwise be provided by a physician, NP or PA.
• Remove barriers that prevent psychiatric pharmacists from prescribing opioid addiction treatments like Buprenorphine.

_The College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP) is a professional association of more than 2,500 members who envision a world where all individuals living with mental illness, including those with substance use and neurologic disorders, receive safe, appropriate, and effective treatment. Most members are specialty pharmacists and Board Certified Psychiatric Pharmacists (BCPPs) who specialize in psychiatry, addiction, psychopharmacology, and neurology. CPNP’s mission is to advance the reach and practice of psychiatric pharmacy and serve as the voice of the specialty._