

# PRESCRIPTION VS ILLICIT OPIOID ABUSE AMONG HEALTHCARE WORKERS SEEKING ADDICTION TREATMENT

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## Introduction

- Opioid abuse remains a serious public health problem
- Healthcare professionals (HCPs) may be at higher risk due to greater access to controlled prescription opioids while working in a high-stress environment<sup>1</sup>
- Findings suggest that 10-15% of HCPs in the US will experience a substance use disorder in their lifetime<sup>2</sup>
- The goal of this study was to examine the association between HCP status and primary opioid abused among individuals enrolling in treatment for an opioid use disorder (OUD)

## Methods

Two Researched Abuse, Diversion and Addiction-Related Surveillance (RADARS®) System data sources were used: the Opioid Treatment Program (OTP) and the Survey of Key Informants' Patients (SKIP) Program

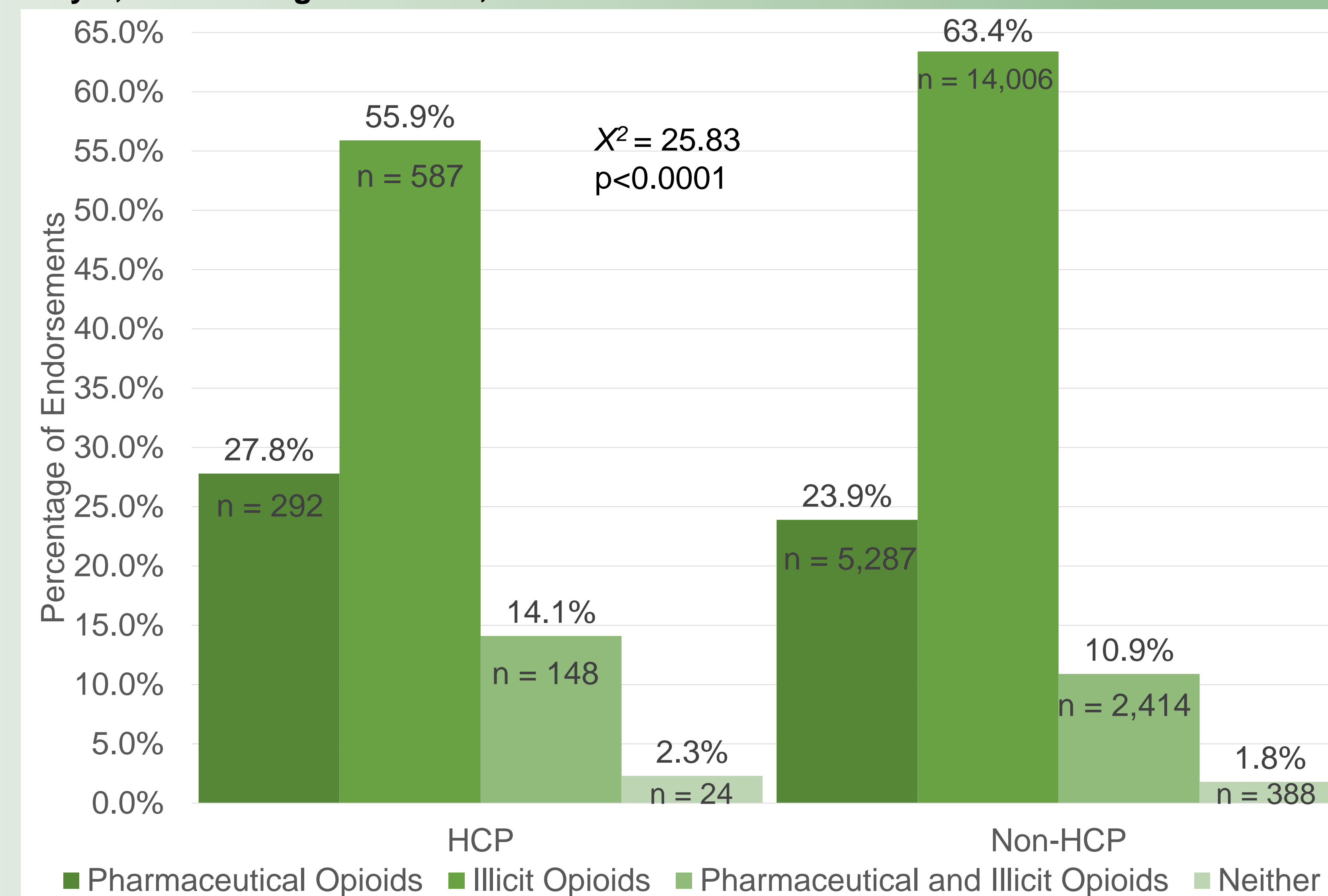
- Individuals aged 18 years or older entering treatment for OUD completed anonymous questionnaires asking about prescription and illicit opioid abuse
- The data collection period was from July 1, 2017 through March 31, 2020
- HCPs were defined as respondents who indicated that they were working as a healthcare professional providing direct patient care in a healthcare setting
- A respondents' primary drug of abuse was defined as the prescription or illicit opioid used to get high the most
- Respondents were assigned to one of four categories based on their primary drug of abuse: pharmaceutical opioids only, illicit opioids only, both pharmaceutical and illicit opioids, or neither
  - Pharmaceutical opioids were defined as endorsements of oxycodone, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, morphine, oxymorphone, methadone, buprenorphine, tramadol, tapentadol, or sufentanil
  - Illicit opioids were defined as endorsements of heroin or fentanyl
- A chi-square test was used to analyze the relationship between HCP status and primary drug of abuse

## Results

**Table 1. Primary Drug of Abuse for HCPs and Non-HCPs Entering OUD Treatment by Treatment Center Program July 1, 2017 through March 31, 2020**

Primary Drug Category	HCP	Non-HCP	P-value
<b>Opioid Treatment Program</b>			
N	732	16,950	
Pharmaceutical Opioid	157 (21.4%)	3,498 (20.6%)	0.0034
Illicit Opioid	450 (61.5%)	11,312 (66.7%)	
Pharmaceutical and Illicit Opioids	110 (15.0%)	1,882 (11.1%)	
Neither Opioid	15 (2.0%)	258 (1.5%)	
<b>Survey of Key Informants' Patients Program</b>			
N	319	5,145	
Pharmaceutical Opioid	135 (42.3%)	1,789 (34.8%)	0.0110
Illicit Opioid	137 (43.0%)	2,694 (52.4%)	
Pharmaceutical and Illicit Opioids	38 (11.9%)	532 (10.3%)	
Neither Opioid	9 (2.8%)	130 (2.5%)	

**Figure 1. Primary Drug of Abuse for HCPs and Non-HCPs Entering OUD Treatment for Treatment Center Programs Combined July 1, 2017 through March 31, 2020**



## Results

- Of the 23,146 respondents included in this study, 1,051 respondents (4.5%) were HCPs
- The p-value was statistically significant for both the OTP and SKIP programs individually (p=0.0034 and p=0.0110, respectively) (Table 1)
- Combining results from both data sources, the distribution of primary drug of abuse endorsements was significantly different between HCPs and non-HCPs (p<0.0001) (Figure 1)

## Conclusions

- A greater proportion of HCPs reported primarily abusing prescription opioids than non-HCPs
- Like non-HCPs, the majority of HCPs reported illicit opioids as their primary drug
- Additional research into the unique risks of nonmedical opioid use and OUD among healthcare professionals is needed

## References

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- Butler Center for Research. (2015). *Health Care Professionals: Addiction and Treatment*. Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation. Accessed January 19, 2021 from <https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/education/bcr/addiction-research/health-care-professionals-substance-abuse-ru-615>

## Disclosure

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