Opioid Epidemic in America

This epidemic is the largest in US history. More people have died from an overdose than at the peak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This is a complex problem with no clear solution in sight. This leaves room for social innovation.

Causes

Additive Nature & Mental Health
Genetic disposition for addiction and existing mental illness are leading factors that cause addiction.

Over Prescribing & Accessibility
Over prescription allowed addictive opioids to be distributed to scores of patients. Easy accessibility encouraged sharing and selling of drugs.

Experimenting & Peer Pressure
Easy access encouraged experimenting with opioids. This happens mainly with younger adults. Being in a culture of drug users encourages drug abuse.

Widespread Effects

42,249 opioids related Deaths in 2016
$504 Billion in healthcare and premature fatality costs in 2015
$24,000 Cost of incarceration per individual
$4,700 Cost of treatment per individual
$10 Billion/year estimated worth of U.S. opioid painkiller market

Current Solutions

Needle Exchange
Jail
Residential Rehabilitation
Good Samaritan Laws
Medically Managed Withdrawal
Education & Counseling
Naloxone Accessibility
Improved Pain Management
Prescriber Training and Consultation
Therapy & Pain Management

Solution Gaps

At Home Patient Monitoring
Regulated opioid use is safer than the alternative. Work in this area would reduce the easy of access to prescription medication by persons other than the patient.

Over Prescribing & Accessibility

Prescribers need to be trained in the practice of safe prescribing and monitoring of their patients' pain management plan.

Addiction Stigma
Public opinion of drug addiction can be harsh. Changing public opinion would allow more resources to be allocated to treating this epidemic.

Therapy & Pain Management
Pain management can be changed to not include opioid use. New pain management plans could include new medications, a holistic approach, or other new therapy approaches.