Digital insights and personalized outreach
The new front line in the fight against opioid addiction
Countless lives have been lost to opioid addiction, and the epidemic has cost the US more than $1 trillion since 2001.

We now find ourselves at a point where even though prescriptions for opioids have been decreasing since 2016, overdose deaths are still on the rise. The fight against addiction will always be a person-to-person, ground-level fight that relies on how effectively one person, perhaps a counselor or family member, can connect with the person who is suffering. However, in today’s data-enabled world, could we be doing more to intervene at a personal level with people at high risk for addiction before they are addicted?

Informed by this idea, we can work together to measure and track the rate of new addictions. We can use our findings to build a predictive model that helps us identify patients who are most at risk. From there, we can work to intervene, enlisting professional counselors and staff to conduct one-on-one outreach after high-risk patients receive a first, or even subsequent, opioid prescription.

In today’s health ecosystem, there are endless ways to gain insights from data that signal opportunities to influence and improve patients’ health care outcomes, lives and well-being. We are now able to address such challenges more creatively, using data and technology to approach disease and addiction prevention in new ways.

So how do we apply this to the national epidemic of opioid addiction? First, we must focus on the knowledge that there are key moments in every patient’s health care journey in which a well-informed and well-timed intervention can influence behavior enough to profoundly impact that patient’s life.

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Telecom, retail and banking organizations already use big data to pinpoint prime moments to reach out to their customers. It’s time the health care industry does the same. The industry must get better at engaging consumers throughout their lives, not just when they are sick.

Today, EY professionals are working to bring this idea to life. Together with our health care collaborators, we have created an addiction prevention platform. In one web- or server-based platform, we offer predictive modeling tools that enable providers, payers and government organizations to:

- Estimate and assess patients’ risk of new addiction
- Carefully monitor new rates of addiction
- Analyze the data geographically and chronologically

Historical demographics and health care claims data can reveal patterns consistent with new addiction. Patterns will help data users identify communities within the population that are most likely to fall into a cycle of addiction and experience an acute need for professional attention.

Having identified high-risk populations, EY professionals work with collaborators to review addiction and outreach programs that can be quickly leveraged, and then we recommend new programs. For substance abuse coaching, we advise our collaborators to hire and train counselors, assess strengths or challenges in their referral system, and create feedback loops – and then course-correct if data does not show improvements.

Through similar programs being implemented today, we see that such programs can effectively enact change for the opioid crisis. But we must act quickly. In 2017, overdose deaths increased by 13% though drug prescriptions declined by 11% in 2017 (see references below). This highlights the reason why we need to focus on reducing new addictions outside of just reducing drug prescriptions.

Today, increasingly sophisticated data and analytics platforms have the capability to deliver this type of informed, preventive care. Using a platform such as this to help slow the rate of opioid addiction is just one small example in an ecosystem chock-full of untapped potential. As consumers increasingly assume a more active role in their health, including taking ownership of their personal health data, the power and impact of data analytics on health is immeasurable. Today’s health organizations must aggregate patient data to leverage their combined potential. It’s essential that they also build platforms that enable easy integration of data from multiple sources. Using data to inform proactive and personalized addiction interventions illustrates its potential to improve the health journey for patients across the health care spectrum. If this is just the beginning, it’s exciting to imagine the possibilities that lie ahead.

Increase in opioid overdoses from July 2016–Sept 2017 in 45 states

30%

https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/maps/create-maps.html
Contact

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