

The Other Opioid Crisis

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The world is in pain. Poverty, illiteracy and government regulations are factors that increase suffering. A lot of terminally-ill patients in poor countries receive no more than acetaminophen for their pain or none at all.

But six developed countries consume 79% of the global morphine while the remaining 21% is shared by the rest of the world (INCB).

Gram for gram, the United States of America consumes more narcotic medication than any other nation worldwide. This has led to misuse and abuse of opioids that led to the so called "opioid epidemic" or the opioid crisis of the Western world.

The other opioid crisis is an older problem, perpetuated by governments and world regulatory bodies on top of an already opioid-scared population. This affects many more people around the world, mostly the poor and underprivileged, who continue to suffer pain until they die.

Historically, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) has focused on strict regulations focusing on combating drug abuse more than assuring access to pain relief. This led states and governments mostly in Latin America, Asia and Africa in the 1960s to enact restrictive laws and regulations on narcotics use and handling. Most of these countries underestimate the opioid needs of their people. This further promoted opiophobia among the population.

While the WHO and INCB are trying to re-educate people to reverse this problem, too few opioid medications are seen in developing countries. The newer opioid medications driven by large multinational companies that enter their market are mostly expensive and beyond their capacity to procure. The cheapest morphine tablets remain mostly unavailable.

Today, we see two opposing crises- too much opioid and too little opioids; both detrimental, both with social and economic consequences, and both needing complex solutions.