

# WELL CHURCH & COMMUNITY CONFERENCE 2022

## OPIOID MISUSE Q&A SESSION

Answered by: Andy Crocker, MS

At least in Liberty County, and I have a hunch in other rural areas too, we are dealing more highly with methamphetamines abuse, and other drugs ... What do we need to know about responding to methamphetamines addiction?

One of the first things to know is that you're not alone in this and, as you alluded, it's a problem in a lot of places. One of the things I can emphasize is that methamphetamine addiction is usually a result of other medication abuse, namely opioid misuse. Opioid misuse may turn into methamphetamine use since it is so much cheaper and perhaps easier to access than prescription opioids, especially with all the regulations surrounding narcotic medication and associated cost.

Some of the ways we can stem the tide of that is what we talked about in the session. Making sure we're taking medications when we need them, securing or disposing of used medications around our house so they're not available for misuse. Additionally, it involves being aware of treatment resources in our community, being open and available to people, and trying not to stigmatize. Yes, it is a problem, and it is a serious problem, but let's not stigmatize it in such a way that people who are using methamphetamines are living in the shadows and feel like they can't reach us out for help. Being familiar with treatment options and resources in our community, or in an adjacent community, can help us make referral for these people.

How would you address the lower pain tolerance with the use of opioids?

Certainly, opioid use over time numbs us to certain pain. And it has a cumulative effect, so we end up needing more and more to get the same effect out of it. One way we can handle that is to only take that medication as needed and when we need it.

In the presentation we talked a lot about non-opioid pain alternatives. A story about me, I happen to get in-grown toenails a lot. When I go to the Podiatrist, he nicks the little corner out and asks, "do you need something for pain?" And my answer could be yes, but I also know because I have experienced this so much that the pain subsides in less than a day and can be controlled with an over-the-counter pain reliever.

Have that conversation with your health provider and ask yourself, "is this really something that I need that strong a medication for or is this something that over-the-counter pain reliever could help me with for a day and I'm on my way." Again, that starts on the front end with making sure having open and honest communication with our health provider on what's going on and what we need and why we need it.

### What are the recommended ways to dispose of unused medicine?

Talk to your pharmacist and see if there are options available there.

As I've talked about in the presentation, minutes from my house there were disposal bins and I never knew they were there. I am in Amarillo, and Amarillo happens to be the home of the Texas Tech School of Pharmacy. Four times a year, they throw open their doors and they host drug take back events with no questions asked. You load all your stuff, take it to them, and they sort and store it and dispose of it as they should be.

One of the resources on the Well Church page is to find a disposal location around your community or find a take back event. You can also consider hosting a drug take back event. If you're going to host a drug take back event though, you need to be very aware that possessing and transporting certain types of medication that are not prescribed for you is illegal. We want to be working with law enforcement right up front, so get with your local sheriff's office or your local police department and have them contact the Drug Enforcement Agency and figure out what needs to happen in your community so that you're doing this safely and doing it the right way. This takes a lot of planning with the law and drug enforcement to do this safely.

### How true is it that after you have been off opioid (or other drugs) for some time, is it easier to overdose?

Overdose can happen in a variety of ways. To go back to that, building up a tolerance issue, if I have taken a certain medication repeatedly, and gotten off of it, if I take it again I may need more of it to get the same effect, putting me in a position where I'm more likely to overdose. Many other things can come into play: am I dehydrated, have I lost lean muscle which helps metabolize medication, and have I built up body fat which helps store some types of medication? Remember, taking an excess amount of any type of medication can result in an overdose, certain medications can have deadly consequences.