Opioid-Related Harm in Older Adults
Older Adults

Older adults also are at risk for experiencing opioid-related harm and developing patterns of misuse.

Although the prevalence of opioid and other substance use disorders is substantially higher in younger patients, older adults are not immune from the risk of non-medical use and substance use disorders, including addiction. First time admissions for illicit drug use is trending upward in older adults (defined as 55 years or older). In 2012, there were nearly 358,000 admissions involving individuals aged 61 years and older to facilities reporting to individual state administrative data systems, most commonly for alcohol or sedatives as the primary substance. Approximately 17,500 of these admissions were for treatment of an opioid use disorder (other than heroin) in 2012. Because of higher rates of substance use disorders in the current “baby boomer” cohort, illicit and non-medical drug use among older adults is expected to increase in the future.

Opioid therapy for persistent non-cancer pain in older adults also is associated with an increased risk of fall-related injuries and all-cause mortality. Additionally, the rate of hospital stays involving opioid overuse has increased significantly over the last two decades across all age cohorts. In 2012, more than 100,000 inpatient stays in patients 65 years and older were attributed to opioid overuse. Additionally, nearly one-third of Medicare Part D recipients being treated with opioid analgesics have prescriptions from multiple prescribers. Whether this primarily reflects the fragmented care that is typical in this population, or is indicative of broader patterns of substance misuse is not clear. Like their younger counterparts, serious opioid use disorders and addiction are more likely to occur in older individuals who have a prior history of substance use disorders.
Opioid-Related Harm in Older Adults

Reference


3. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Treatment Episode Dataset. Substance Abuse Treatment Admissions by Primary Substance of Abuse, According to Sex, Age Group, Race, and Ethnicity Year = 2012, United States.


