



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Tufts Health Care Institute Program on Opioid Risk Management**

**Meeting on**

**UNDERSTANDING THE TYPES OF OPIOID ABUSERS**

**September 2007**

Prescription opioid abuse is a public health problem in the United States that has multifaceted ramifications. “Addiction” to prescription opioid prescriptions is a well-publicized consequence, but concerns relating to dependence, abuse, misuse, or diversion and regulatory sanction also deter many physicians from prescribing opioid analgesics. Such concerns hinder legitimate patients’ access to adequate pain treatment. The ramifications of prescription opioid abuse are perceived differently by the diverse stakeholder groups such as government agencies, nongovernment organizations, law enforcement, pharmaceutical companies, health care payers, professional medical societies, and academia, however, none of these groups really are equipped to address the entire problem.

A panel of experts participated in a Tufts Health Care Institute Program on Opioid Risk Management -supported symposium on “Understanding the Types of Prescription Opioid Abusers” held on September 27 and 28, 2007 in Boston, MA., addressed challenges the use of typology for the development and utilization of prescription opioid analgesics, while seeking to minimize the risk of abuse and diversion. The use of typologies, or the differentiation of groups that share one or more common characteristics, can be a useful approach for classification of relatively homogenous groups, called subtypes. When applied to psychiatric and substance use disorders (SUDs), subtyping is an abstract category organized according to some conceptual, theoretical or clinical principle with a primary purpose of improving diagnostic classification and making the most efficient use of clinical services. Approaches to typology can be univariate when based on a single variable such as sex, age-of-onset, family history, personality profile, and psychotherapy, or multivariate if based on a combination of factors. Identification of specified homogenous subgroups may advance research in several areas such as etiology and genetics, prevention, interventions, behavioral treatments, health services research, and

pharmacotherapeutics. The product of subgroup analysis provides a better understanding of outcomes that may facilitate treatment matching, or help to predict the course and prognosis of the SUD.

Highlights of the conference addressed the importance of looking at more well refined typological methods used to delineate various types of alcoholics. When dealing with opiate addiction more specifically, developing more valid and reliable screening instruments is paramount to delineate better detection of prescription opioid abuse. It was also discussed that epidemiological methods, while temporally informative, have not fully identified subtypes with different patterns of high risk prescription opioid use. When used to identify subgroups and subtypes, the hope is epidemiologic research can assist general practitioners and mental health professionals to better identify the most prominent dependence symptoms and the subgroup of users more prone to development of opioid analgesic dependence. On the other hand, the majority of opioid subtypes discussed are based on clinical observation however, there is a great deal of overlap across these groups. Sharpening the boundaries of the current understanding of subtypes will help clinicians weigh the risks versus benefits when deciding whether to prescribe long-term opioid therapy, to determine an appropriate level of monitoring, and provide tailored interventions for treating prescription opioid use disorders. Classification based on opioid poisonings identified a unique research endpoint, however is comprised of diverse at-risk populations. Finally looking toward the future, genetic research holds unique promise to identify individuals at highest risk but may not help identify social characteristics of abusers.