

## Opioid Crisis - Choose Physical Therapy First

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Since the mid-1990's, health care providers have employed a more pharmacological approach to managing pain rather than treating the actual causes of the pain. This strategy has resulted in a dramatic increase in opioid prescriptions as well as an increase in opioid misuse/addiction. This increase has quadrupled the number of opioid deaths in the last 15 years and over 47,000 people died in 2017 alone. In an effort to reverse this epidemic, a collaborative approach needs to be made by physicians, pharmacists, insurance companies, and health care systems to find alternative ways to treat pain without opioids.

A recent study looking at more than 200,000 commercial and Medicare Advantage insurance beneficiaries has revealed a significant pattern among those experiencing low back pain. Patients who sought physical therapy initially were 85% less likely to receive an opioid prescription within 30 days compared to patients who saw their primary care physician first. Unfortunately, only 1.6% of these patients saw a physical therapist first and 53% initially sought care from their primary care physician. This is unfortunate because there is a growing body of research that supports the use of physical therapy for low back pain.

Physical therapists are health care professionals who specialize in evaluating and treating patients for musculoskeletal impairments that can be contributing to their pain. Based on the physical therapists' judgments about diagnoses and prognoses, and based on each patient's personal goals, PTs design individualized plans of care, provide appropriate interventions, conduct re-examinations, and modify treatment as necessary to optimize patient outcomes. They also work closely with other professionals in the health care system, including physicians, nutritionists, exercise specialists, and behavioral health specialists. Choose physical therapy first to eliminate pain, optimize your function, and be one step closer to living pain free. Illinois law no longer requires a physician's prescription to receive physical therapy, and you can choose where to go for physical therapy.



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