

Real Opioid Harm Reduction

Despite the escalating opioid epidemic, policymakers have failed to take the necessary steps to encourage use of safer alternatives for pain relief

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-- Proposals for opioid "harm reduction" tend to be limited to safe injections sites, places where people who use injectable, but illegal, opioids such as heroin, can do so without fear of overdose or prosecution. That's way too late, according to chronic pain expert Cindy Perlin, LCSW, founder and CEO of the [Alternative Pain Treatment](#)

[Directory](#). "Opioid addiction is extremely difficult to overcome. Real opioid harm reduction starts with not prescribing opioids in the first place. Studies have indicated that 80% of opioid addicts started with prescription opioids, yet doctors and dentists continue to prescribe these highly addictive drugs to new patients when better alternatives exist," says Perlin.

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Aggressive marketing of prescription opioids in the past have convinced many healthcare providers and patients that pain patients are not at risk of opioid addiction and that the drugs are highly effective, and these beliefs persist despite extensive evidence that neither are true, according to Perlin. Safer and more effective alternatives for acute pain include over-the-counter NSAIDs like ibuprofen and naproxen, cannabis and [kratom](#), a Southeast Asian herb.

Perlin reports that treatment of chronic pain is best addressed by getting to the root of the problem, which may include muscle imbalances, chronic stress, unresolved trauma, nutritional deficiencies, an inflammatory diet, toxic substances or central sensitization (when the brain continues to send pain signals even when tissues have healed). Safe, effective treatments for pain conditions include acupuncture, biofeedback, chiropractic/osteopathic manipulation, herbs, massage, mind/body therapies, nutritional intervention, physical therapy, as well as therapies



U.S. Policymakers have failed to adequately address the opioid crisis

that speed tissue healing such as red/infrared light therapy, pulsed electromagnetic frequency therapy (PEMF) and/or microcurrent therapy. Use of safe, natural painkillers like cannabis and kratom can be continued until pain subsides.

"Despite the ever-escalating opioid overdose crisis which has reportedly claimed over 1 million lives, healthcare policymakers have failed to take the aggressive steps necessary to curtail the crisis. These include educating healthcare providers and patients about effective pain treatment alternatives and making them more affordable and accessible by requiring insurance coverage. Instead, healthcare authorities have continued to oppose federal legislation legalizing marijuana and have tried to ban kratom both domestically and internationally. They have given only lip service to encouraging use of other treatment alternatives", says Perlin.

Marijuana and kratom have also been demonstrated to be opioid sparing. Opioid users who start using them tend to reduce or eliminate opioid use. Kratom, in particular, can smooth opioid withdrawal, helping addicts to more easily recover. It's time for the FDA and CDC to embrace, rather than oppose, use of these substances, insists Perlin.

In addition to her ongoing work with the Alternative Pain Treatment Directory, Cindy Perlin is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who specializes in treating chronic pain, a chronic pain survivor and the author of [The Truth About Chronic Pain Treatments](#): The Best and Worst Strategies for Becoming Pain Free.

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