

Routine, coordinated treatment of opioid abuse can stem national epidemic

July 14 2018, by Franny White

To help stem the nationwide opioid epidemic and related increases in HIV, hepatitis C and other infections, health care providers should routinely screen and treat patients for opioid abuse when they come to clinics and hospitals seeking other services.

That's one of five recommendations outlined in a paper published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. The paper supports a newly published document that outlines the proceedings of a March 12, 2018, workshop convened on the topic by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.

"Treatment can save lives," said one of the paper's authors, Todd Korthuis, M.D., M.P.H. "The national opioid epidemic can turn around if we embrace opioid use disorder as a [chronic medical condition](#) that needs treatment instead of a moral issue or the result of poor willpower."

Korthuis, who is a professor of medicine (general internal medicine and geriatrics) and head of addiction [medicine](#) in the OHSU School of Medicine, also participated in the National Academies workshop and reviewed the resulting proceedings document. He co-wrote the paper with Sandra A. Springer, M.D., of the Yale School of Medicine and Carlos del Rio, M.D., of the Emory University School of Medicine, both of whom also participated in the workshop.

The [workshop](#) highlighted one of the many dire consequences of the opioid epidemic: more people are turning to injection drug use after

their [opioid](#) prescriptions are cut off, which in turn has led to an increase in life-threatening infections of the skin, joint, blood, bone and more. These serious infections require expensive and lengthy hospital treatments, but most hospital staff don't regularly address the root cause: drug addiction.

More information: Sandra A. Springer et al, Integrating Treatment at the Intersection of Opioid Use Disorder and Infectious Disease Epidemics in Medical Settings: A Call for Action After a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Workshop, *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2018). [DOI: 10.7326/M18-1203](https://doi.org/10.7326/M18-1203)

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