

Pediatricians have role in fighting opioid epidemic

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Editor's note: *The 2018 AAP National Conference & Exhibition will take place from Nov. 2-6 in Orlando.*

At any one time, Deepa R. Camenga, M.D., FAAP, is treating about 30 patients with opioid use disorder who range in age from 16-25. At the core of treatment is buprenorphine.

“Buprenorphine is an excellent medication to stabilize patients and help them with their recovery, and you’ll see a change in their clinical picture really quite quickly. It’s kind of amazing,” said Dr. Camenga, a member of the AAP Committee on Substance Use and Prevention.

Dr. Camenga will discuss a range of treatment options, focusing on buprenorphine’s effectiveness, during a session titled “Opioid Use Disorder Treatment in Adolescents (F3053)” from 9:30-10:15 a.m. Monday, Nov. 5, in room W311EF of the convention center. She also will review AAP policy and discuss options to complete an eight-hour training program required to apply for a waiver to prescribe buprenorphine.

About 115 Americans die every day from opioid overdose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Furthermore, drug overdose death rates among 15- to 24-year-olds increased 28% from 2015-’16.

“Pediatricians are very uniquely poised to help some of the most vulnerable people affected by this epidemic, meaning adolescents and their families, because much more of our medical community is trained to deal with adults but very few are trained and able to work with younger people,” said Dr. Camenga, assistant professor of emergency medicine and pediatrics, Yale School of Medicine, New Haven, Conn.

While working with young people affected by the opioid epidemic, Dr. Camenga found few resources in her community for adolescents. So, she took a training program to prescribe buprenorphine and started an outpatient treatment program for adolescents and young adults with substance use disorders.

“I was lucky enough to be around many colleagues who prescribed to adults who reassured me that it is something I could do,” she said.

Dr. Camenga plans to reassure pediatricians that providing medication-assisted treatment is something they can — and should — do as well.

“We are a wonderful resource in our communities where we practice,” Dr. Camenga said, “and we have a role in fighting this epidemic.”

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