



Opioid epidemic stems from black market use, not prescriptions, says doctor

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WASHINGTON (TND) — The opioid epidemic is facing another crisis, as doctors are hesitant to prescribe pain medications to patients because of new regulations, new laws and misunderstanding of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's latest guidelines.

Dr. Jeffrey Singer, a senior fellow at the CATO Institute, recently co-authored an article arguing the opioid epidemic should not be blamed on patients with legitimate chronic pain.

"Policymakers have decided, wrongly, for years now that the overdose crisis is the result of doctors overtreating patients with opioids, But, in fact, research from the University of Pittsburgh and the CDC has shown that the overdose crisis has been growing exponentially since the 1970s, way before doctors started prescribing opioids liberally," said Singer to The National Desk's Jan Jeffcoat. "Almost all of the overdoses have involved non-medical and recreational use in the black market."

Singer said since prescription opioids were blamed for the increase in overdoses, doctors have cut back on prescribing opioids.

"And now, they're cutting back in dramatic ways," said Singer. "And now, some patients are getting desperate and going to the black market."

According to Singer, states should instead emulate Alaska in dealing with the opioid crisis.

"Every state has what is called drug paraphernalia laws which make it illegal to possess, sell or distribute devices and things that can be used to make, test or use drugs. There's only one state that doesn't, and that is Alaska," said Singer.

Many areas of the country try to implement harm reduction methods such as testing kits and needle exchange programs, which Singer says have been "proven to reduce overdose deaths." But drug paraphernalia laws can make harm reduction programs difficult, with things like clean needles and fentanyl test strips considered drug paraphernalia in most states.

"Most political leaders and public health officials are now recognizing the value of turning to harm reduction to reduce overdose deaths," said Singer.