



Stanford
MEDICINE

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The Honorable Orrin Hatch
Chairman
Senate Committee on Finance
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Finance
Washington, DC 20515

Sent to: opioids@finance.senate.gov

Dear Chairman Hatch and Ranking Member Wyden:

I am writing in response to your February 2, 2018 letter requesting policy recommendations and feedback to inform the Senate Finance Committee's deliberations on the opioid epidemic.

We must work to mitigate the start of opioid prescriptions. If opioids are prescribed, we must help patients minimize their need and use of the drugs for pain relief. **Regulations are not enough. Prescribing limits are not enough. We must give doctors and patients the tools to treat pain differently.** Pain, opioid misuse and addiction share neurobiological underpinnings. **We cannot fully address the opioid epidemic without allocating budget to treat pain better.**

I am a pain scientist and pain psychologist. I was recently awarded an almost \$9 million PCORI research award to conduct a voluntary opioid tapering study in almost 900 patients taking long term opioids and to test evidence-based psychological strategies that equip patients with the tools to best control their own pain. Less pain and fewer pills through pain education and skills building. It works. Now we need to allocate budget to:

- (1) **Train more psychologists**, healthcare clinicians, and doctors about the role of psychology in the experience of pain, need and use of opioids, and how to integrate psychological approaches to minimize risky opioid use. I am available to help with this, free of charge.
- (2) **Provide patients with basic pain psychology education and tools at point-of-care.** Give it in the Emergency Department before scripts are started. Give it to patients in primary care. Give patients the information and resources they need and deserve. Their lives depend on it.
- (3) **Recommend that doctors screen patients prior to opioid prescription** for (1) risk factors; and (2) identification of therapeutic targets that respond to basic, low-cost educational interventions.

I developed and teach a single-session pain psychology class. I can teach up to 90 patients at a time at low or no cost. I have a \$4 million NIH grant to study my class further. The point is, we can be creative in finding ways to **give patients access to the information and tools that allows us to treat their pain comprehensively – at lowest cost—in a empowering way that best ensures their function, quality of life, and their survival.** My sincere thanks for your time.

Beth Darnall, PhD

Principal Investigator, Stanford PCORI Project on Opioid and Pain Reduction