

## What you Need to Know:

# Use and Abuse of Opioids in Workers' Compensation

- Prescription drugs cause more U.S. deaths now than heroin and cocaine combined.
- Opioid overdose and death are covered under a workers' compensation claim if the medication was prescribed for a work-related injury.
  - Narcotic addiction can be classified as a limitation on the ability to return to work under the 2012 Loss of Wage Earning Capacity Guidelines.
- According to one of the top pharmacy benefit managers in the country, 68.7% of all injured workers utilize narcotics.
- 41% of the money that NCA's clients spent on pharmacy benefits went towards narcotic medications in 2011.
- The first pain medications to contain hydrocodone without other non-narcotic drugs mixed in are currently being developed, and are set to be released over the next few years.
  - Experts are preparing now so as to prevent the hazards of addiction and overdose.
- In various states, legislation and regulation has successfully been put forth to attempt to control the over prescribing of these drugs.
  - New York's restrictions were rolled back after an outcry from treating physicians that addicted patients would go through painful, potentially deadly withdrawal if narcotics were discontinued all at once.
- Until New York has effective regulations on the prescribing and use of opioids, it is important to use other methods to control the financial and human costs of prescription abuse:
  - **Early intervention is key**, before the claimant becomes dependent on narcotics, to encourage more conservative pain management techniques.
    - Identification of risk factors: history of depression, family or personal history of addiction.
  - Nurse case management is one of the only tools NYS self-insured employers have to control pharmacy costs:
    - NCA's **Pharmaceutical Cost Containment Program** endeavors to work with claimants and doctors to encourage more responsible use and oversight of pain management drugs, as well as to open communication between treating physicians if the injured worker is "doctor shopping"

*Sources Include: Business Insurance Magazine, Risk & Insurance Magazine, workerscompensation.com*