

# Labors' TRUST FUND NEWSLETTER



Health and Welfare • Pension • Apprenticeship and Training • Annuity • Vacation & Holiday • LECET

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## Nurse's Station

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## WHAT IS THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC?



Perhaps you have heard the term opioid epidemic on the news, social media or in social circles. In the United States over the last 20 years there has been an increase in deaths from prescription pain medicine by over 237% percent in men and over 400% in women ([www.asam.org](http://www.asam.org)). Four hundred percent in women and two hundred thirty seven percent in men since 1999, those numbers are astounding statistics. According to the CDC, 91 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose. What is an opioid? Opioids are a class of drugs that act on opioid receptors in the brain to produce morphine-like effects (Wikipedia). Drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the United States ([www.asam.or](http://www.asam.or)). Morphine, Fentanyl, Percocet, Vicodin, Tramadol, Oxycontin, Oxycodones, codeine, heroin are some examples of opioids. Opioids act on the brain's pain receptors and help relieve the feelings of pain and at the same time give the user a feeling of euphoria, sometimes mild, sometimes extreme. It is important to note that the pain may be relieved but opiates do NOT cure or even contribute to the cure of the cause of the pain itself.

Generally, these drugs are prescribed for pain but can be very addictive. There are many contributing factors that created the problem that we are seeing today in our country, and it is a problem that is unique to the United States. An unfortunate component was the miseducation of physicians for a period of time. They were taught that as long as opioids were being taken as directed and as long as the patient had pain then the patient could not get addicted to the drugs. FALSE. Even in the presence of pain and even if the patient isn't intentionally abusing the drugs, the patient can still get addicted to them. There are many states with prescription laws limiting the amount of days a doctor can prescribe opiates for their patients. The laws are limiting prescription days from 5 to 7 days in an attempt to prevent addiction from happening. These laws apply to acute, or new, pain and new prescriptions.

Chronic pain, or pain that has been persistent for months or years, that is being treated with opiates is a more complex issue and one that the medical community is grappling to resolve. Often times when a sufferer is trying to wean off of opiates, the pain becomes almost unbearable. The body has become dependent on the drug. However, with time, people can be successfully weaned, if other therapies are an option for them to use. Often, although not always, using opiates to manage chronic pain makes it difficult to know what is going on with a person's body, the drug can mask symptoms and signs that could point to more accurate diagnoses. Also, opiates can actually make the pain worse over time because tolerance to the drug develops and a person will need more and more and more to get relief and eventually will not get relief at all or get very little relief. It takes patience in both the sufferers and the providers to walk through the weaning process together, but if there is a will there is a way. And there is hope.

### Things you can do:

- Use opiate pain medicine only as directed and ask your doctor if non-opiate pain relieving measures are available
- Watch you tube video "Pain Pills are not your best friend" by Sohrab Gollogly
- Limit the amount of days that you take the medication
- Dispose of all unused medication; this helps prevent the medication from getting into the hands of your children or teens.
- Don't give away your pain medicine and don't take anyone else's (it is against the law)
- Use caution or do not use opiates at all when taking benzodiazepines

## Nurse's Station Continued

Remember, no one wants you to suffer in pain, but some pain is to be expected with injury and illness. If you have a serious injury or illness and have been prescribed opiates for pain management, please take them, but take them seriously. It is important to know that dependence and addiction to these powerful drugs can develop within days to weeks once a person begins to take them. Taken responsibly, these medications can improve your quality of life or help you while recovering from surgeries. Always take them under the supervision of your physician.

These drugs were originally designed as a way for healthcare providers to give compassionate and caring palliative care at the end of life for patients who were terminally ill or gravely injured, not to end the lives of their patients. Take them if needed, but take them seriously.

Mahalo.

Donna Robinson RN, BSN, HNB-BC

Director of Healthcare Management for the Hawaii Laborers' Health and Welfare Fund

### Urgent Care vs Emergency Room

How do you know where to go?

Members are frequently using the Emergency Room for routine or non-emergency visits, when they could just as easily visit an Urgent Care clinic. Although Emergency Rooms are equipped to handle any ailment, they are best utilized for handling severe illness, injury or other medical emergencies. Urgent Care clinics are a better treatment choice for minor illnesses and injuries and by visiting, (when appropriate), you will receive the same level of care by trained medical professionals. Claims deemed non-emergent could result in denial of claim and therefore result in non-payment. Save yourself some major time and money by visiting the Urgent Care when you need immediate medical assistance! So how do you know which option is best for you?

### URGENT CARE

When you have an illness or injury that does not seem life threatening, go to your urgent care. Visit the urgent care when you have these symptoms:

- Cold/cough/flu
- Fever
- Sore throat
- Ear ache
- Sprains/strains/simple fractures
- Cuts/scrapes
- Minor burns
- Rashes/skin irritation
- Headache
- Nausea/vomiting
- Urinary tract infection
- Back pain
- Mild asthma
- Pink eye
- Gout
- STD test
- Infections

### EMERGENCY ROOM

Emergency rooms can handle trauma, surgical procedures and other life threatening situations. Visit the ER for care when you

experience any of the following:

- Chest Pain or tightness
- Signs of stroke-weakness/facial droop/change in speech
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Loss of consciousness
- Difficulty breathing
- Head or neck injury
- Severe trauma
- Fracture with bone protruding
- Change in vision
- Change in mental status
- Seizure
- Serious burns
- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Fever - infants less than 2 months old
- Severe allergic reaction
- Sudden severe abdominal pain

Urgent care and walk-in clinics offer an array of treatment options for your immediate health care needs. If you are not certain of your symptoms, call the Urgent Care in advance and ask a medical professional. If you are experiencing a life-threatening medical emergency, call 911 or go to nearest emergency room! Call your health plan carrier to find an urgent care center near you!

## Vacation & Holiday Fund

To see if you are on the list of unclaimed vacation checks, visit the Hawaii Laborers' website at [www.hilabtrust-funds.com](http://www.hilabtrust-funds.com).

At the home page, select Vacation & Holiday, then click on the downloads link. Under the Misc. section, there is a link to the unclaimed vacation checks list.

Note: You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to view the list.

Should you have any questions, please contact the trust fund office at 1-808-441-8600, or for neighbor islands, call toll free at 1-888-520-8078.

## Trust Fund Reminder

### PLEASE CALL THE TRUST FUND OFFICE

#### RIGHT AWAY WHEN YOU...

- Change your address or phone number
- Have a newborn baby or adopt a child
- Get married or divorced
- Change your beneficiary information
- Have a death in your immediate family
- Become disabled and unable to work



To make changes to your Health and Welfare records, specific forms must be completed and submitted to our office by specific due dates. **Failure to meet such due dates may affect your coverage and/or coverage for your dependents.** Please don't delay and call our office right away so you can meet the required deadline!

**TRUST FUND OFFICE – MEMBER SERVICES DEPARTMENT**  
**1-808-441-8700**, or for neighbor islands, call toll free at **1-888-520-8078**.

## Disability Benefit Reminder

If you become disabled and unable to work due to an illness or injury, the following are benefits that you may be eligible to receive provided that the disability commenced while you were eligible under the Hawaii Laborers' Health and Welfare Fund:

1. Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI). For a non-occupational accidental bodily injury or sickness, which disables you and prevents you from engaging in your occupation, you may be eligible to receive a weekly benefit of 58% of your average weekly wage.
2. Disability credits. If you become disabled and unable to work, you may not have the work hours needed in a given month to continue your coverage. Disability credits will be applied to your account to help maintain your eligibility so you do not lose your coverage. To receive this benefit, a Disability Certification form must be received by the trust fund office no later than (45) days from the date of injury or illness. Disability credits may be afforded even if the injury or illness is work-related.

Note: For a work related injury or illness, see your employer to inquire about benefits under Workman's Compensation.

