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VA Secretary praises department's model path to ending opioid addiction

Statement follows President Trump's remarks at summit addressing drug crisis

WASHINGTON — Calling the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs a recognized leader in pain management and opioid safety, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie today underscored the department's innovative [approaches to chronic pain management](#).

Wilkie's response followed President Trump's speech April 24 at the annual [Rx Drug Abuse & Heroin Summit](#) in Atlanta, where stakeholders gathered to discuss prevention, treatment and actions to curtail the opioid crisis.

"More than 100 million Americans suffer from some form of chronic pain, and the overuse and misuse of opioids for pain management in our country is taking too many lives," Wilkie said. "Veterans who have served our nation are particularly challenged by chronic pain. VA has demonstrated success in reducing opioid use, while addressing the challenge of living well with chronic pain."

Over the past six years, VA's Opioid Safety Initiative (OSI) has reduced opioid dispensing more than 50%. Most of this reduction is attributable to not starting new, long-term opioid therapy in Veterans with chronic pain.

Specifically, VA is not starting Veterans with chronic, noncancer pain on long-term opioid therapy, but is instead offering them complementary pain management strategies. These treatments include use of complementary therapies, such as acupuncture, yoga, chiropractic medicine, tai chi and bio-feedback, among other modalities, and have proven to be more effective for Veterans long term. Veterans are 40 percent more likely to have severe, chronic pain than non-Veterans.

VA has employed four broad strategies to address the opioid epidemic: education, pain management, risk mitigation and addiction treatment. VA addressed the problem of clinically inappropriate high-dose prescribing of opioids, while developing an effective system of interdisciplinary, patient-aligned pain management to provide safe and effective pain control. In the process, VA trained hundreds of clinicians on this approach to pain management.

VA's approach is Veteran-centric and whole health. By understanding the Veteran's goals and lifestyle and incorporating a variety of therapeutic treatments, Veterans are now achieving success in managing chronic pain.

VA continues to offer full transparency of its efforts to reduce opioid prescribing. To learn about the VA Opioid Safety Initiative or for more information on VA pain management, go to www.va.gov/painmanagement.

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