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End the Opioid Epidemic

Devastating. Heartbreaking. Gov. Eric Holcomb calls it haunting. In 2016, more than 1,500 Hoosiers died from drug poisoning, a 500 percent increase since 1999. A staggering statistic is that since 2011, nearly 7,000 Indiana residents have lost their lives to drug overdoses. This tragic epidemic has touched many Hoosiers in some way. As an emergency physician, I treat an overdose patient every shift I work. These patients come from all areas of life and represent Hoosier families, friends and neighbors. The Indiana State Medical Association (ISMA), with its 8,000 physician members, is committed to being part of the solution to prevent and end opioid deaths in Indiana.

We believe a coordinated approach to ending the opioid crisis will be most effective; we are collaborating with and supporting other industry partners, government officials and stakeholders, and action steps are under way.

ISMA has continuously advocated for the use of INSPECT – Indiana’s state prescription drug monitoring program – to help health care providers make informed prescribing decisions based on a patient’s medication usage. Last July, a new prescribing law took effect; it prohibits writing a new opioid prescription for longer than seven days, except when a doctor determines it is necessary. Since then, there have been 100,000 fewer prescriptions for opioids in our state.

Broad education is essential to making a difference. In the late 1990s, physicians were trained to consider pain as the “fifth vital sign” of a patient’s health status, along with pulse rate, temperature, respiration rate and blood pressure. While pain medication is still appropriate treatment in some cases and will continue to be, a reset is necessary. Physicians are now more likely to work with their patients to find non-opioid treatments, rather than just reaching for a prescription pad. ISMA has accepted a call to serve as a leader in this fight by offering free monthly education to all health care providers. On the third Thursday of every month, medical experts discuss best practices for opioid prescribing and addiction. This education effort is paramount as guidance and best practices evolve. ISMA also supports SB 225, a proposed law moving through the General Assembly this session that specifically calls for opioid prescribing education.

In recent years, Indiana stakeholders have established chronic pain rules and emergency department guidelines for treating pain. Now, the Indiana State Department of Health, the Indiana Hospital

Association and ISMA have developed acute-pain prescribing guidelines to further guide best practices. We are united in using every tool possible to reverse the opioid epidemic.

Access to treatment for addiction is being expanded and must continue to increase. Use of the life-saving overdose-reversal drug naloxone must continue to expand. Barriers to accessing alternative, non-opioid therapies must continue to be removed. And the stigma of addiction must end. Addiction is a disease; it can be treated, and recovery **is** possible. Indiana physicians remain committed to use all available tools, every day, to help keep Hoosiers alive and well.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John P. McGoff". The signature is stylized with loops and a cursive-like flow.

John P. McGoff, MD

President, Indiana State Medical Association