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SURVEY: MOST WILLING TO FORGO OPIOIDS AFTER SURGERY IF PAIN CAN BE EFFECTIVELY MANAGED WITHOUT THEM

Protocol that targets pain with common, safer drugs found to manage pain as well or better than opioids

Orlando, Fla – Due to the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), 2020 was the deadliest year on record for drug overdoses, with more than [93,000 deaths](#) in the U.S. For too many, addiction begins in the hospital, where opioids are widely prescribed after surgeries or injuries. A new national survey by [Orlando Health](#) finds nearly four out of five Americans believe opioids are necessary to manage pain after surgery, but most would also be open to forgoing these potentially harmful medications if there are better options.

The survey found that 65% of Americans are more worried about managing their pain than the risks of opioid addiction, but more than two-thirds (68%) would be willing to try opioid-free pain management after surgery.

“It’s very important for us to keep in mind that people do have pain and people do need pain control. The solution is not to just pull opioids away from people and leave them to fend for themselves,” said [Luke Elms, MD](#), a general surgeon at [Orlando Health Dr. P. Phillips Hospital](#). “That is a real problem after surgery that needs to be addressed in a compassionate manner.”

Dr. Elms has implemented a protocol that uses common over-the-counter drugs like acetaminophen, ibuprofen and muscle relaxers. Used in coordination, these safer medications can offer powerful pain relief that is more targeted to a patient’s specific areas of pain than the blanket coverage of opioids. It also helps patients recover faster without the side effects that accompany opioids like nausea, dizziness and constipation.

“When I talk to patients and reassure them that we’re going to be replacing opioids with a much more effective and safe method, and really talk to them about the risks of opioids that have become much more evident with the research that’s come out recently, most patients are very open to the idea,” Dr. Elms said.

Dr. Elms says some patients are so worried about becoming addicted to opioids that they delay the care or procedures they need. Andria Herr was not willing to take that risk when she learned she needed surgery to remove her gallbladder.

"I lost someone close to me as a result of addiction from prescribed medications after a medical procedure," Herr said. "So I did extensive research to find a surgeon that uses the ERAS program, or Easy Recovery After Surgery, which is based on the idea that there are no opioids, but your pain is managed. I was happy to find Dr. Elms, who had a protocol in place that has proved to be effective and safe."

The opioid avoidance program is part of a comprehensive approach at Orlando Health to combat the opioid epidemic. It works in tandem with Jaime Bridges, an opioid coordinator at [Orlando Health Orlando Regional Medical Center](#) who is trained to recognize those who are struggling with or at risk for opioid use disorder. Bridges provides counsel and resources to ensure patients are supported while they're in the hospital and also after they leave.

"It's obviously common for people to become addicted to opiates. So for the millions of people who have already struggled with that disorder, their risks are greatly exacerbated," Bridges said, "When these patients are discharged, whether they were here for an overdose or an injury, we give them all of our contact information and that person can call us, even in the middle of the night, and we will answer the phone and provide the support they need."

Bridges' personal experience with opioid use disorder helps her relate to patients and gives them hope that recovery is possible. She became addicted after being prescribed opioids for an injury as an Orlando police officer.

"My recovery date is coming up on 10 years," Bridges said. "When I walk into the room and say, 'I was a cop, and I've been where you are,' it helps them realize that addiction can happen to anybody. And fortunately or unfortunately, I've had a lot of these awful experiences patients are going through, so I feel like I'm passing the threshold for them so maybe they don't have to. It's my job to come in and advocate for them, be a voice with them by their side when they're feeling so small."

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Courtesy: Orlando Health

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Survey Method:

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of **MediaSource** between October 19-21, 2021 among 2,006 US adults ages 18+. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact Shannon McCormick at Shannon@mediasourcetv.com.

ABOUT ORLANDO HEALTH

Orlando Health, headquartered in Orlando, Florida, is a not-for-profit healthcare organization with \$7.6 billion of assets under management that serves the southeastern United States.

Founded more than 100 years ago, the healthcare system is recognized around the world for its pediatric and adult Level One Trauma program as well as the only state-accredited Level Two Adult Trauma Center in Pinellas County. It is the home of the nation's largest neonatal intensive care unit under one roof, the only system in the southeast to offer open fetal surgery to repair the most severe forms of spina bifida, the site of an Olympic athlete training facility and operator of one of the largest and highest performing clinically integrated networks in the region. Orlando Health is a statutory teaching system that pioneers life-changing medical research. The 3,200-bed system includes 15 wholly-owned hospitals and emergency departments; rehabilitation services, cancer and heart institutes, imaging and laboratory services, wound care centers, physician offices for adults and pediatrics, skilled nursing facilities, an in-patient behavioral health facility, home healthcare services in partnership with LHC Group, and urgent care centers in partnership with CareSpot Urgent Care. Nearly 4,200 physicians, representing more than 80 medical specialties and subspecialties have privileges across the Orlando Health system, which employs nearly 22,000 team members. In FY20, Orlando Health served nearly 150,000 inpatients and nearly 3.1 million outpatients. During that same time period, Orlando Health provided approximately \$760 million in total value to the communities it serves in the form of charity care, community benefit programs and services, community building activities and more. Additional information can be found at <http://www.orlandohealth.com>, or follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @orlandohealth.