

**Report from the Opioid Summit, November 2016, Ottawa.
Fiona Campbell (President Elect, Canadian Pain Society)**

Canada faces a crisis with escalating, overdose and death caused by opioids. In response, the Federal and Ontario Ministers of Health, Jane Philpott and Eric Hoskins co-hosted a 2-day Opioid Conference and Summit in Ottawa, to develop a Joint Statement of Action to address this crisis, which I attended on behalf of the CPS.

Joining Health Canada, provincial health ministers, and policy makers from across Canada were people with lived experience (parents of teens who had died, people who use drugs) together with 40 key stakeholder organizations representing health care regulators (e.g., Canadian Medical Association, all provincial colleges of physicians and surgeons, family practitioners, nurses & pharmacists, CMPA, Accreditation Canada), educators, researchers (e.g. CIHR), and other regulatory agencies. While the conference was focused on addiction, the CPS was invited to attend as well as two people living with pain who also attended.

There are many contributory causes to this crisis including but not limited to illegally imported fentanyl, opioid overprescribing, lack of pharmacosurveillance, limited access to comprehensive addiction treatment programs, and poor pain management due in part to insufficient pain education, inadequate funding for pain research, and limited access to other treatment options (physiotherapy, psychotherapy, specialized interprofessional pain programs).

Health Canada and all participant organizations have signed their commitments to a Joint Action Plan that includes: i) Informing Canadians about the risks of opioid use, ii) supporting better prescribing practices, iii) reducing easy access to unnecessary opioids, iv) supporting alternative treatment options for patients, v) improving evidence to inform policy and vi) reducing availability of street drugs. A detailed list of participants and their commitments can be found at <http://bit.ly/2foUOBk>. A key deliverable will be the Health Canada funded Guideline for Safe and Effective Use of Opioids for Non-Cancer Pain. The Canadian Centre of Substance Abuse (CCSA) has been charged with quarterly monitoring and reporting on measurable outcomes.

While the focus of the Summit was predominantly on addressing the downstream factors contributing to the crisis of illicit fentanyl related deaths, it is clear that a root cause analysis of upstream factors is necessary to inform an effective solution. While opioid prescribing is cited as an important risk factor for the crisis, it is critical to distinguish between rates of a) illicit opioid use, which are increasing, and b) prescription opioid misuse, which are declining. In response to government pressure to curb opioid use there are disturbing trends emerging; physicians refusing to prescribe opioids fearing reprisal from professional bodies, suicides by pain patients for whom opioids were cut off, patients suffering from acute opioid withdrawal in ERs, patients seeking illicit opioids to treat their pain. Vulnerable people living with chronic pain for whom opioids not only reduce pain, but

importantly improve function and health related quality of life, must not be marginalized.

The Minister of Health, Dr Philpott, is absolutely committed to developing a pan-Canadian approach that is “comprehensive, collaborative, compassionate and evidence based”. We are hopeful that this will include improved care for all people with pain.