Foreword
More than “Just Say No”

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In 2001, the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations issued standards for hospitals designed to draw attention to the underassessment and undertreatment of pain. Many organizations reacted by adopting the “5th vital sign” of pain assessment. The Wong-Baker FACES Pain Rating scale was used widely by practices to identify the pain status in all patients. Narcotic prescriptions, which had already been rising, increased even further as providers were “educated” by pharmaceutical companies as to the safety of opioids. Physicians welcomed having something “safe and effective” in their armamentarium to help relieve their patients’ suffering. It took more than a decade to realize the harms from chronic opioid use. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that in 2016 more than 2 million Americans suffered from substance use disorders related to prescription opioid pain relievers and more than 60,000 people in the United States died of an opioid overdose. In October of 2017, President Trump directed the Department of Health and Human Services to declare the opioid crisis a “public health emergency.” He went on to say that the government would initiate “really tough, really big, really great advertising” aimed at persuading Americans not to start taking drugs. “This was an idea that I had, where if we can teach young people not to take drugs,” the President said, “it’s really, really easy not to take them.”

Despite the recent focus on narcotic use and abuse, other substances continue to negatively impact health. It is estimated that 80% of the more than 21 million Americans suffering from a substance abuse disorder have an alcohol use disorder. Providers are often uncomfortable dealing with such disorders and/or feel limited in their ability to address the psychosocial issues surrounding the abuse. Physicians appear to be more comfortable assessing and addressing tobacco use. Despite this, tobacco use continues to be the leading cause of preventable death in the United States.

Although it would be great if the entire population “just said no” to abusing substances, it seems unrealistic. Physicians need to know how to assist patients in dealing...
with their addiction. In this issue of the *Medical Clinics of North America*, Drs Samet, O’Connor, and Stein enlisted experts to assist clinicians in identifying, assessing, and treating substance abuse disorders. In addition to focusing on tobacco, alcohol, and opioids, the authors have also addressed issues relating to newer popular potential agents for abuse, including novel drugs and e-cigarettes.

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