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Dr. Tyler Barrett is spreading the word about opioid addiction.

# Facing Off Against A Dangerous Opponent

## Nashville Doctor And Hockey Dad Spreads The Word To The Grassroots About The Dangers Of Opioids

**A**t first glance, Tyler Barrett looks like a typical hockey parent. His son Ryan is a slightly small but skilled forward with a 14 & Under team competing in the Nashville Youth Hockey League, where Tyler also serves on the board.

But in his day job, he is a team physician for the Nashville Predators and medical director for the Vanderbilt University Medical Center Adult Emergency Department. Like many physicians, Barrett is on the frontlines when it comes to dealing with the alarming rise in the use and abuse of opioids, especially among young people. What's even more shocking is how those impacted are younger and younger each year. And that includes those who are involved in team sports.

"The opioid epidemic is devastating our nation," Barrett said. "On almost every shift, I see victims, both patients and their families, of this crisis. Many patients first started taking pills after they were prescribed following an injury or surgery."

To help raise awareness of this crisis, Barrett volunteers his time to speak with players and parents at various youth hockey organizations regarding the growing opioid epidemic and the impact it's having in youth sports.

Like a true hockey fan, this Massachusetts native and University of Michigan alum intertwines hockey trivia to drive home the point of how this epidemic continues to spread.

"Who are the best past and present NHL players to wear" the uniform numbers 3, 4, 66 and 77," he will ask. Then Barrett shows slides that incorporate these numbers into what's happening with opioid abuse around the country.

Barrett sees his message hitting home, particularly among players and parents at the 14 & Under and 16 & Under age levels. "I have received calls from parents after their children were injured telling me that they keep thinking about my talk when discussing pain medication with their physicians."

Barrett hopes to continue to reach out to other youth hockey associations to ensure that everyone is on the same team when it comes to taking on opioid use among student athletes of all types, including hockey players.

"If these talks keep even one student athlete from using opioids, then I consider this work a huge success," Barrett said. ☆

-Harry Thompson

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*"On almost every shift, I see victims, both patients and their families, of this [opioid] crisis."*  
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### OPIOID FACT CHECK

#### What is an Opioid?

A type of medicine that is used to decrease feelings of pain: (Includes prescribed medications and illegal street drugs)

- codeine, morphine (MS Contin)
- hydrocodone (Norco, Lortab, Vicodin)
- oxycodone (Percocet, Oxycontin)
- oxymorphone, Methadone
- hydromorphone (Dilaudid)
- heroin, fentanyl, carfentanyl (China White, black tar, brown sugar, dope, smack, horse, TNT)

#### What do teens think about prescription drugs?

- 1 in 5 teens report abusing prescription medications to get high
- 2 in 5 teens believe that prescription meds are "much safer" than illegal drugs
- 31% of teens believe there's "nothing wrong" with using prescription meds without a prescription "once in a while"
- Nearly 3 in 10 teens believe prescription pain relievers are not addictive

#### Why is this relevant to ice hockey players?

→ A study of 21,000 high school seniors across 16 sports found that ice hockey players had substantially greater odds of heroin use and nonmedical use of prescription opioids in the past year. In 2017, there were 72,000 overdose deaths in the United States. For every overdose death, there are an estimated 30 non-fatal overdoses.

#### Does an individual have to take pills for a long time to become addicted?

→ No. 1 in 12 individuals who have not recently used opioids, but receive more than a 4-day prescription, will continue to use at one year. That could mean that if each player on a typical roster was prescribed four days of opioids at some point during the season, two players would still be using a year later.

#### ACTION PLAN

→ After consulting your physician, treat pain first with over-the-counter pain medications (acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol™), ibuprofen (e.g., Motrin™, Advil™), or naproxen (Aleve™)).

In acute extremity injuries, there is no clinically important difference in pain relief when given and ibuprofen and acetaminophen together compared to common opioids (hydrocodone, oxycodone).

Unbearable pain is not OK, but it is important to take the least amount of opioids possible. If opioids are needed for severe pain, take the lowest dose for the fewest days, after consulting with your physician.

Individuals who are struggling with mental health disorders are at higher risk for substance abuse. Recognizing these players and getting them help if appropriate can help prevent future problems.

Seek help from your doctor if concerned about yourself or a friend or call 1-800-662-HELP (4357). Resources are available at: [drugabuse.gov/children-and-teens](http://drugabuse.gov/children-and-teens)

Search your medicine cabinets and properly dispose of all unused opioid pills in your home.