



CEO - Clinical Group

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2021 Institutes of Health WorkComp TODAY

FEATURED INTERVIEW Dr. Clark Smith, MD



January 2021

INSTITUTESOFHEALTH.ORG

IOH is highlighting individuals making an impact and exemplifying excellence in the field of Workers' Compensation. This month we sit down with ...

Dr. Clark Smith, MD
Medical Director
Institutes of Health

- ⇒ Founding Medical Director of San Diego's largest chemical dependency recovery hospital Sharp McDonald Center/Vista Pacifica from 1989 to 2012
- ⇒ Board certified in Pain Medicine by American Academy of Pain Medicine
- ⇒ Board certified in Addiction Psychiatry and Forensic Psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology
- ⇒ Completed an Internal Medicine internship and worked as an emergency medicine physician while completing specialty training in Psychiatry
- ⇒ Former Chief Resident at the UC San Diego Health (UCSD) Medical Center
- ⇒ Former Chief of Staff at Mesa Vista Hospital
- ⇒ Past President of the San Diego Psychiatric Society
- ⇒ Past President of the San Diego Psych-Law Society
- ⇒ Former Adjunct Professor in Forensic Studies at Alliant University San Diego

IOH. You have such an impressive work history. What is it about Institutes of Health (IOH) that enticed you to join our team?

CS. In my private practice, I was treating patients in recovery from opiate dependence who were also experiencing chronic pain. I had helped them to successfully stop using opiates, but they were facing another surgery and were afraid of becoming addicted all over again. I saw Workers' Compensation patients who wanted to work, but their attempts to return to the workplace caused increased damage, increased pain, and reinjury. When I met the IOH team, I marveled at their outcomes. They have assembled and trained an extensive group of specialists, all working together to treat the whole patient, combining really advanced clinical skills with cutting-edge biometric technologies. They were treating the patient's biological, psychological, and social/occupational problems in a unified plan of care, and not just separate treatments for their disjointed body parts. I was inspired by the results they

IOH is GROWING

Exciting news! We are thrilled to announce the opening of our newest clinic location in Riverside County!

OPEN JANUARY 2021



Institutes of Health

5885 Brockton Avenue
Riverside, CA 92506

Delivering Proven Solutions in Workers' Compensation for PTSD, Head Injury & Concussion, Chronic Pain, Sleep Problems, and Prescription Drug & Rehabilitation.

were getting with patients. I had to be a part of this.

IOH. Managing pain for injured workers can be a challenging prospect for the worker, the doctor and the insurer. How do you balance between helping workers heal so that they can get back to work, and guarding against addictions to pain medications?

CS. Most workers with acute injuries today are treated very well with short-term pain control interventions. The system works well for acute pain. When pain persists and is not getting better after 90 days, opiate pain medications often interfere with recovery. The first rule of pain medicine is that any treatment must lead to increased

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function. If opiate pain medications ease pain, but decrease activity and cognitive acuity, the drugs will close the window of opportunity for rehabilitation, recovery, and a return to a full life. I have the support of an incredible team at IOH to move patients forward toward real recovery as I taper them off the opiate medications. If our patients can get the treatment they need, they are always better off and have less pain without chronic opiates.

IOH. Recent stats indicate that more than 20 million people in the United States have a substance use disorder, and over 100 million suffer from chronic pain. The current pandemic has left many locked down, laid off, and flooded with uncertainty. So far, experts see signs of relapses, rising overdoses, and other worries. What can be done to tackle this epidemic head-on?

CS. This crisis has caused a sharp increase in depression, leading to self-medication with substances. We are seeing a rising loss of life attributed to deaths of despair. This category includes addiction and overdose, reckless accidents, and intentional suicide. As millions more of us gain immunity from vaccination and from surviving the infection, we can create an effort to safely reach out to anyone still isolated and shut in. There are millions of unemployed that would benefit from being involved in projects to promote our country's recovery and reduce isolation.

IOH. PTSD, chronic pain, brain injuries, and associated disability are representing 80-90% of the costs driving Workers' Compensation. What can be done to reverse these trends?

CS. PTSD, chronic pain, and brain injury all can break the patient's ability to have meaningful participation in their life. This break leads to a vicious cycle caused by the combined effects of three problems, physical, mental and occupational disability. As many as 90% of patients respond to basic treatments that successfully treat the physical injury alone. The small percentage of patients that do not respond account for over

2021
Institutes of Health
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webcast

CHRONIC PAIN
When an Epidemic and Pandemic Collide!

Carlos Luna
Host

Mark Pew
Moderator

Clark Smith, MD
Panelist

Brook Feerick, RN
Panelist

Lisa Fitzpatrick, DROT
Panelist

Avrom Gart, MD
Panelist

There have been many **CONSEQUENCES** by adding a pandemic (COVID) to an epidemic (opioids). One of the most dangerous, in both the short- and long-term, is the **IMPACT** on injured workers that are **MANAGING CHRONIC PAIN**, especially those using prescription painkillers. This panel will discuss the **PAST** and **PRESENT** and what lessons these clinicians have learned that can be applied to the **FUTURE!**

FEB 10th **12 PM** PT **POWERED BY risico**

80% of costs. Without intensive intervention the vicious cycle can become permanent, generating a lifetime of accumulated costs. When each area of disability is treated by a coordinated, multidisciplinary team, we can see a comparatively rapid return to function and maximum medical improvement. A return to useful work is the ultimate beneficial outcome for any patient.

IOH. While the national narrative is heavily focused on the deaths and damage that the opioid epidemic is causing, there are some successes worth noting. Can you share one story that you hold near and dear to your heart?

CS. I see many patients with neuropathic pain, such as Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS), that are incorrectly treated with high-dose, chronic opiates. One of these patients had very severe pain that was getting worse in spite of increasing opiate doses. The opiate medications had been increased to the point of causing multiple secondary

injuries from falling. When the neuropathic source of pain was identified and treated, opiates could then be tapered off, resulting in better pain control. That patient is now improved to the point of returning to full-time work and is now actively helping others.

IOH. Thank you for your time, Dr. Smith. In closing, how do you plan to keep a healthy work/life balance in this New Year?

CS. I have already quit caffeine, and I am working out four times a week. I plan to take more walks on the beach, more hikes in the beauty of nature, and less time on the couch. We will see how long my resolutions will last. It is now three weeks into the New Year. So far, so good!

IOH. Thank you, Dr. Smith for taking time with us this month. Cheers to a happy and healthy 2021!