

Mount Sinai partnership to scale youth addiction treatments

The Addiction Institute of Mount Sinai and the Center on Addiction have formed a strategic alliance to invest in new addiction treatments for adolescents and young adults.

On average, 200 people die every day from overdose, 20 of them teenagers, said Joseph Plumeri, executive chair of the Center on Addiction and a Mount Sinai Health System trustee. Still, the primary forms of addiction treatment for adolescents and young adults remain those designed for older adults.

"We wait to focus on the addiction that's entrenched in older people rather than trying to really sever that pipeline early," said Yasmin Hurd, professor at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and director of its Addiction Institute. "And if you're going to really prevent and stop the progression to severe substance-use disorder, you need to work with the youth, teens and young adults."

Successful adult treatments don't necessarily work in younger people, Hurd added. The main treatments for opioid use disorder involve drugs such as Methadone and buprenorphine, so-called opioid agonists, which stop cravings and withdrawal symptoms. "They have saved many lives," Hurd said, "but for youth, we want to try different strategies using medications that are not so addictive."

The alliance between Mount Sinai and the Center on Addiction will address pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatment initiatives, Hurd said, including behavioral health, digital apps and technology for monitoring substance use and connecting with peers—even transcendental meditation. The collaboration also will focus on developing hard data, needed for advancing new treatment avenues and scaling them nationally, she said.

"The goal of the alliance," she said, "is to move that ball way down the field rather than kicking it incrementally."

Both Mount Sinai and the Center on Addiction plan to make financial investments in the initiative, including the hiring of a program director. Recruiting for that job is underway, Hurd said. Both entities will apply for research grants, she said.

"We can take what we do at Mount Sinai and give that solution set to other hospitals," Plumeri said.