Penn State Launches Research Center to Study Opioid Addiction

The center will study heroin, prescription painkillers and other drugs in order to develop new treatments for addiction.

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Penn State Medical School is launching a research center in Philadelphia to study the effects of opioid addiction, the Daily Pennsylvanian reports.

According to a university announcement, the Penn Addiction Center of Excellence (PACE) will bring together researchers from the University's radiology and psychiatry departments to study the impact of opioids on the brain. Researchers intend to use their findings to help develop new substance abuse treatments, citing the ongoing epidemic of opioid addiction in the United States.

The center will be funded through a five-year $8.9 million grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse's P30 Grant Program. By uniting research groups from different fields, grant recipients say they hope to better understand the mechanisms underlying opioid use disorder.

To begin, researchers say they will focus on opioid receptors in the brain and how they affect sensitivity to the drug. They will also examine how brain chemistry affects factors like addiction and suicide in people addicted to drugs like heroin and prescription painkillers.

To conduct their research, radiologists will be using positron emission tomography, or PET, imaging techniques. This will allow them to study changes in brain function as a result of opioid use at a molecular level, potentially opening up new avenues of treatment.

To learn more about opioid addiction and its current treatments, click here.

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