

Harms and Benefits of Opioids for Management of Non-Surgical Chronic Low-Back Pain: A Systematic Review

Hannah-Rose Tucker, BS; Katie Scaff, BS; Tess McCloud, BS; Kim Carlomagno, BS; Kathleen Daly, BS; Alessandra N Garcia PhD, PT; Chad E Cook, PT, PhD, MBA

Background

- Although commonly prescribed, no major multidisciplinary low back pain guidelines recommend opioids as an initial intervention for chronic, non-cancer pain
- 75% of people addicted to heroin were originally prescribed an opioid
- Opioids have many undesirable side effects
- Tolerance due to prolonged use can create a cycle in which patients require higher and higher doses
- **Despite these facts, and a growing epidemic, opioids are commonly prescribed for low back pain without considering a more conservative approach first**



Purpose

- Investigate the harms and benefits of oral opioids for low back pain compared to placebo and other interventions
- To assess the quality of literature regarding opioid use for low back pain

Image Source: <http://www.thebodyworkclinic.com/common-causes-of-back-pain/>

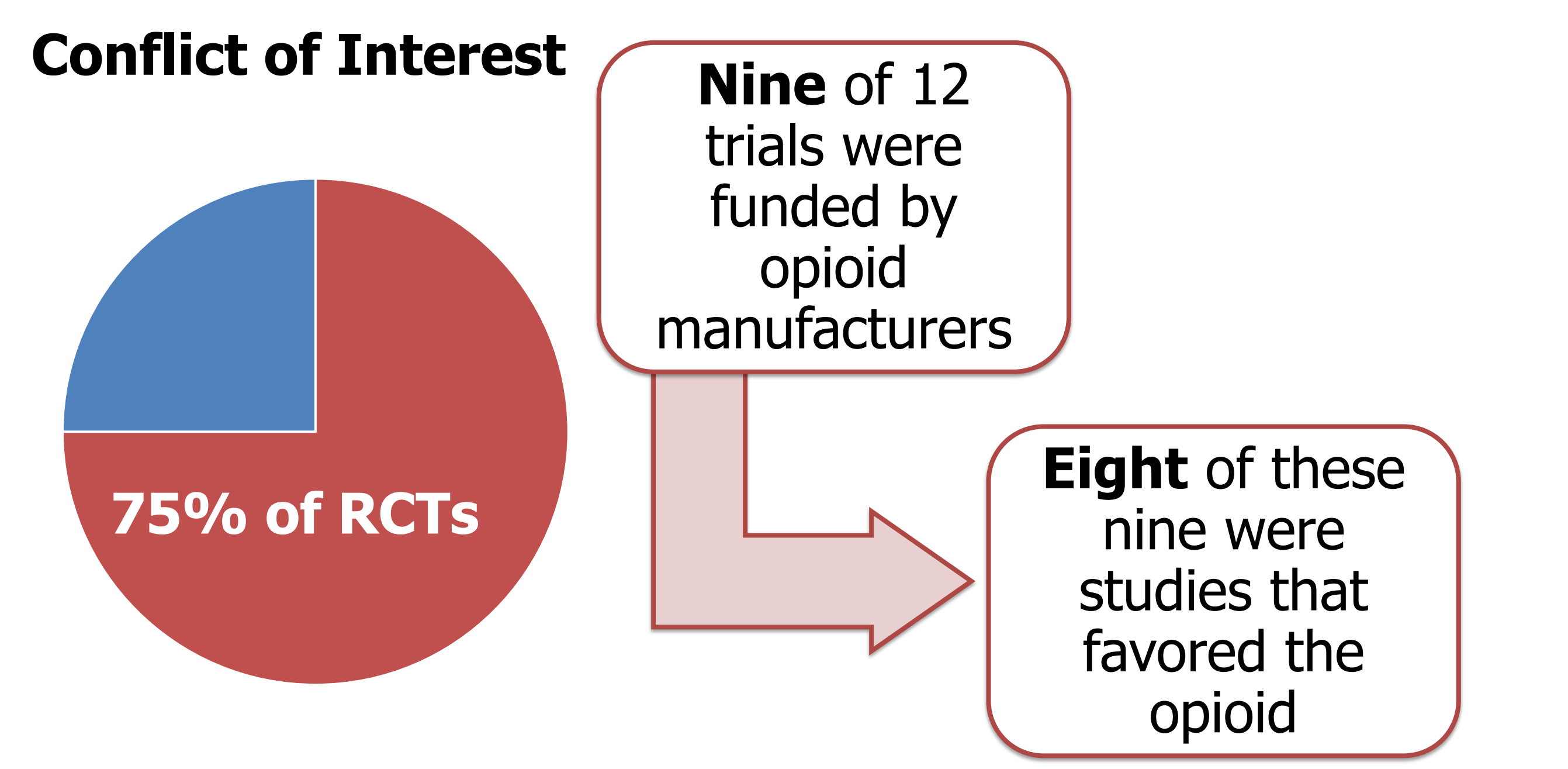
Results

- 12 RCTs met criteria and were included in our review
- Opioids produced greater pain relief than placebo, but were **NOT superior to non-steroidal anti-inflammatories**
- High rates of **adverse events** and **patient withdrawal** were associated with oral opioid intervention
- The higher the dose of opioids, the higher the rate of harms
- All trials were **short-term**
- **Significant conflict of interest was found in most studies**



Image Source: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/americas-opioid-crisis-how-children-are-casualties_us_58b44ecfe4b0658fc20f9828

Analysis

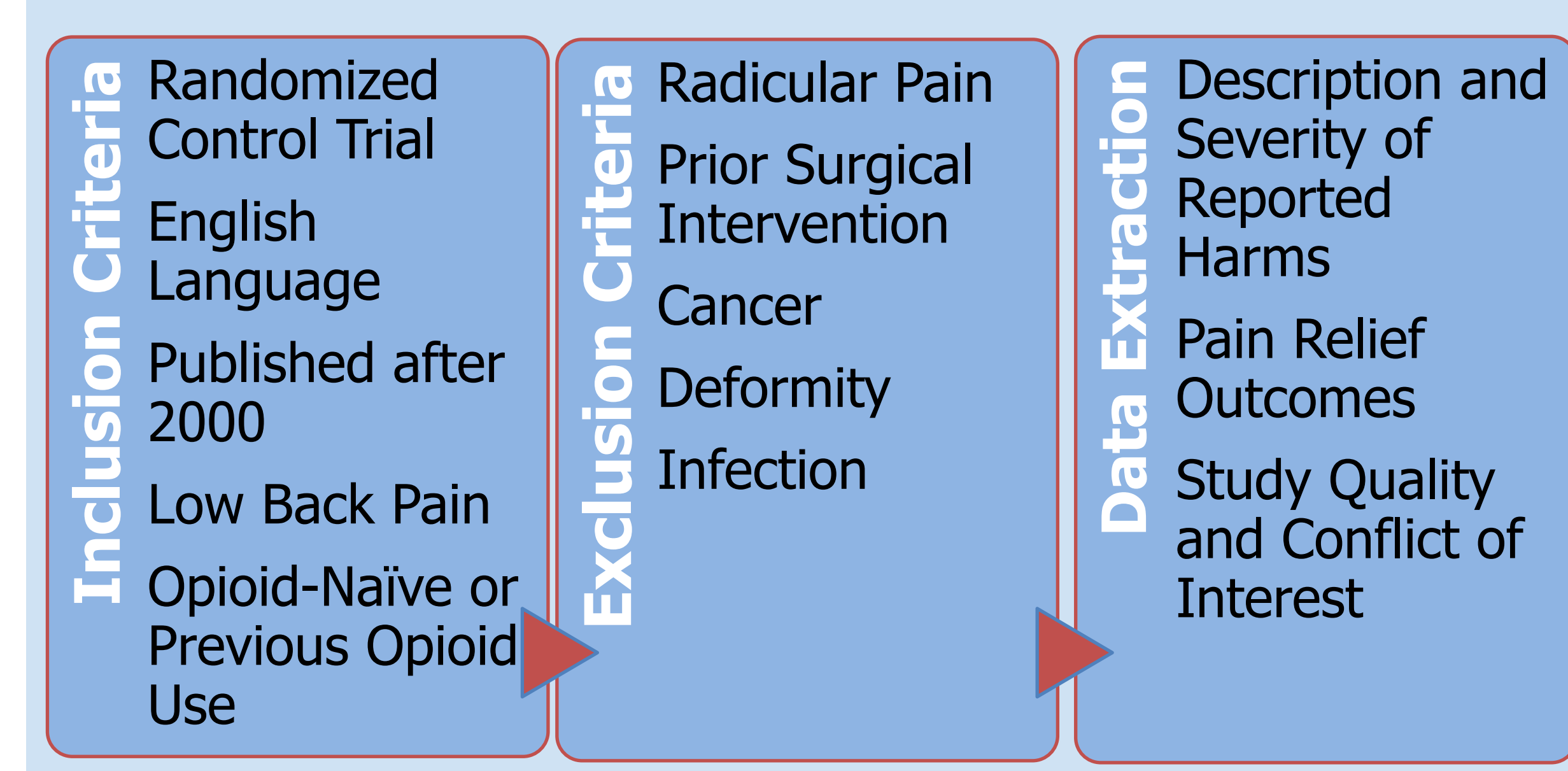


Conclusions

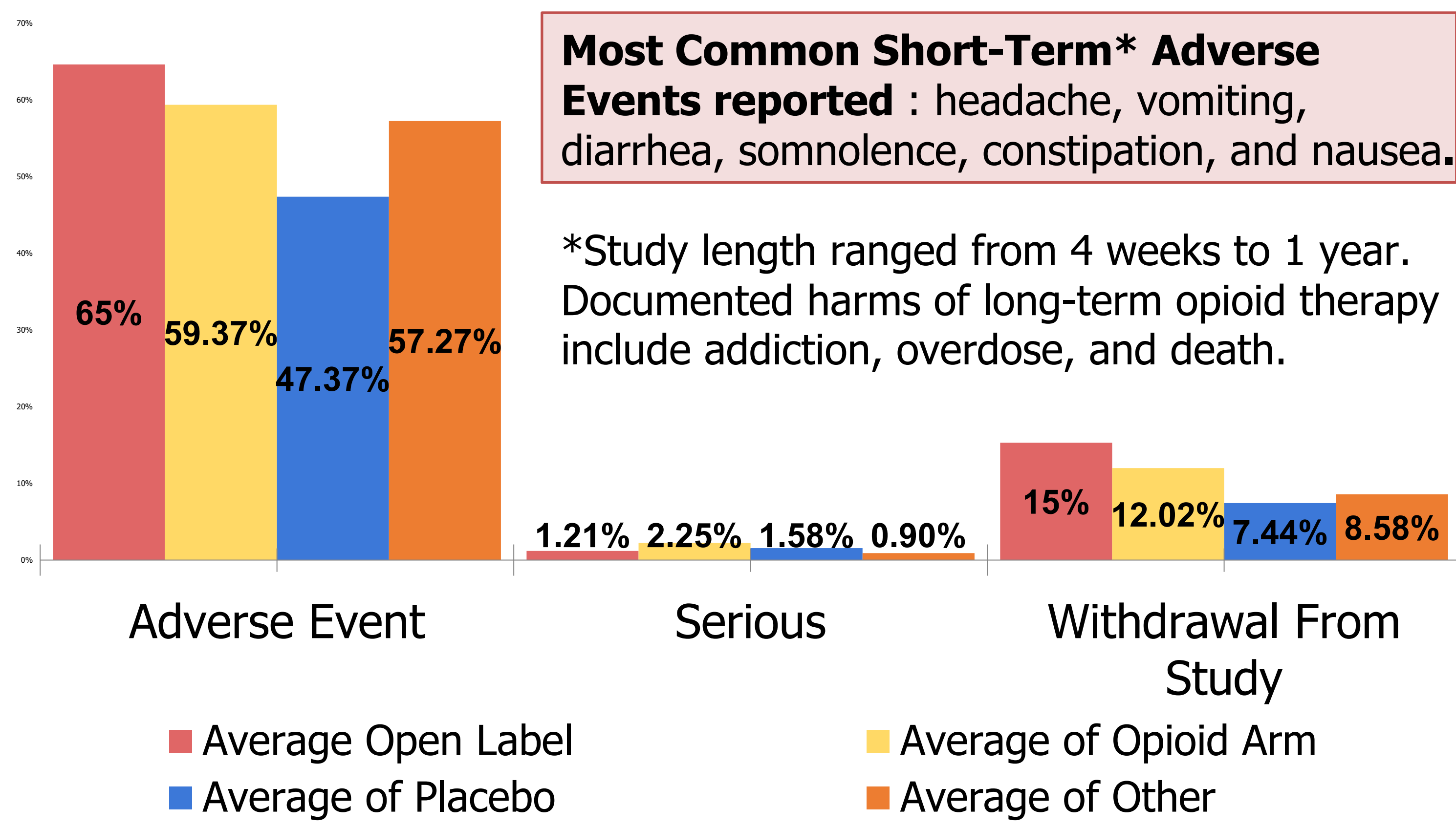
- Despite being funded by pharmaceutical companies, many studies reported significant harms and high drop out rates of data
- Higher incidences of harms are present with the use of opioids, and outcomes do not appear to be superior to comparators such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory agents
- The results of these trials support current low back pain guidelines and do not condone the initial use of opioids in management of low back pain
- The research lacks long-term follow-up data, which would provide the necessary information to assess the withdrawal effect that has led to this epidemic

Methods

- A systematic review was performed using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guideline and was conducted in MEDLINE, Embase, and Web of Science.



Percentage of Patients Experiencing Adverse Event



Clinical Relevance

Opioid use leads to high incidences of harms and should not be prescribed for the treatment of low back pain.



Image Source: <https://www.teenchallengeusa.com/news/opioid-rage-2/pill-bottles>

Acknowledgements / References

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