

## **MEDICAL BREAKTHROUGHS** **RESEARCH SUMMARY**

TOPIC: VIRTUAL REALITY MANAGES PAIN WITHOUT OPIOIDS  
REPORT: MB #4675

**BACKGROUND:** Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers available legally by prescription, such as oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), codeine, morphine, and many others. All opioids are chemically related and interact with opioid receptors on nerve cells in the body and brain. Opioid pain relievers are generally safe when taken for a short time and as prescribed by a doctor, but because they produce euphoria in addition to pain relief, they can be misused. An opioid overdose can be reversed with the drug naloxone when given right away. Improvements have been seen in some regions of the country in the form of decreasing availability of prescription opioid pain relievers and decreasing misuse among teens.  
(Source: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids#summary-of-the-issue>)

**VIRTUAL REALITY:** Using VR can not only help curtail the use of opioids and other prescription medications, which saves money, it can also reduce the length of hospital stays for some patients. Research suggests that VR can alleviate acute pain from burns, wounds, childbirth, dental procedures and brief surgeries. VR isn't a silver bullet for pain, but for some patients it can be effective enough to eliminate or mitigate the need to use painkillers.  
(Source: <https://health.usnews.com/health-care/patient-advice/articles/2019-01-14/how-virtual-reality-can-help-treat-chronic-pain>)

**NEW TECHNOLOGY:** Jeff Hathaway, a Physical Therapist and CEO & Founder of Breakthrough Physical Therapy said, "What's interesting about managing pain over the years is what we understood about pain and what we're taught about pain in medical school was completely wrong. And about three years ago, I began to realize that when I was sitting through a class on the neuroscience of pain and began to realize, wait a minute, this is completely different. And then when you understand how pain really works and then you look at the opioid crisis and the approach we had with pain it just wasn't going to get to the cause of the problem. So, we began to go down a road of how can we start changing the dialogue and change how we actually address pain, both acute and chronic or persistent pain?"  
(Source: Jeff Hathaway)

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS REPORT, PLEASE CONTACT:**

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**If this story or any other Ivanhoe story has impacted your life or prompted you or someone you know to seek or change treatments, please let us know by contacting Marjorie Bekaert Thomas at [mthomas@ivanhoe.com](mailto:mthomas@ivanhoe.com)**