The death rate from opiate overdoses among Veterans Affairs (VA) patients is almost double the national average, according to a report by the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR).

Prescriptions for hydrocodone, oxycodone, methadone and morphine have jumped 270 percent in the past 12 years among VA patients, the report found.

The VA continues to prescribe increasing amounts of opiates to many patients, PBS NewsHour reports. The agency has issued, on average, more than one opiate prescription per patient for the past two years. Experts and advocates told CIR the VA is overmedicating patients as it tries to meet the demand for more complex treatment.

"Giving a prescription, which they know how to do and are trained to do, is almost a default," said Dr. Stephen Xenakis, a psychiatrist and retired brigadier general who served as commanding general of the Army's Southeast Regional Medical Command. He added opiates hurt more veterans than they help.

The VA said in a statement it is engaged in multiple, ongoing efforts to address prescription drug abuse among veterans seen in our healthcare system." Regulations issued by the agency in 2009 required doctors to follow an integrated approach to helping veterans in pain. The regulations call for a stronger focus on treating the causes of pain, instead of using narcotics to reduce symptoms, the article notes.

Adoption of the regulations varies widely across the country. Doctors at a VA hospital in rural southern Oregon prescribed eight times as many opiates per patient as those in the VA hospital in Manhattan, N.Y.

A study published last year found veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder were more than twice as likely to receive opiates compared with veterans without mental health problems. These patients are at greater risk of overdose and suicide.