

“Sometimes I Have a Duty of Care Not to Call 000”: Reported Practices, Attitudes and Factors Influencing Consumer Responses to GHB Overdose

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Introduction / Issues: Gamma Hydroxybutyrate (GHB) carries a high-risk for overdose. Prevalent experiences of GHB overdose have been recorded in Australian and international studies among GHB consumers. A recent coronial review of GHB-related deaths highlighted the pivotal role of bystanders in responding to overdose.(1)

Method / Approach: Given elevated prevalence of GHB use among LGBTQ people in Australia interviews were conducted with 31 sexuality and gender diverse Australian residents reporting three occasions of GHB use in the previous 12 months. Participants were asked to describe experiences of overdose events and their decision-making processes throughout and after GHB overdose. Thematic analysis was conducted.

Key Findings: Most participants reported managing a friend’s GHB overdose and described attempts to retain responsiveness via noise, pain, and dosing stimulants. Practices to manage airways via the recovery position and monitor for frequency of breathing were reported. Calling an ambulance was often considered a last resort with some reporting barriers associated with cost, police, fear of stigma in hospital settings and attitudes that GHB overdoses does not constitute fatality risk, many narrated a sense of duty not to subject a peer to hospitalisation for a GHB overdose not perceived as risky.

Discussions and Conclusions: Despite the high prevalence of GHB overdose and the emphasis placed on GHB overdose in health promotion, to our knowledge this is the first study to detail consumer perspectives and responses to GHB overdose. Findings highlight some effective and some harmful bystander responses to overdose and inconsistent understandings of the potential severity of GHB overdose.

Implications for Translational Research: Given the prevalence of GHB overdose and subsequent mortality risks, studies of targeted overdose response training programs for GHB consumers are warranted. Our findings highlight possible intervention education points to promote first aid principles and address barriers to ambulance attendance.

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