

ESTABLISHING A SURVEILLANCE STUDY FOR EARLY DETECTION OF FENTANYL-LACED HEROIN IN AUSTRALIA

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Introduction / Issues: There is considerable international concern relating to the potential increasing supply of fentanyl-laced heroin. Providing a harm-reduction response where the substance consumed may be unknown represents a unique public-health challenge. While there is some preliminary evidence that high-potency opioids are available in Australia, we are unaware of any research to determine the extent of high-potency opioids within Australian heroin supplies.

Method / Approach: We describe a current pilot study that involves conducting very brief surveys combined with an instant urine sample test kit with 100 people who report recent (past 48 hour) heroin use every 3-6 months over 2 years at Sydney's Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC).

Key Findings: Preliminary analysis of wave 1 data collection from July/August 2017 will be presented, including the proportion of fentanyl and derivatives detected among heroin users who do not self-report fentanyl use, and the feasibility of conducting the pilot. Information generated through this study will allow for a rapid public-health response to occur, should fentanyl-laced heroin be detected in Sydney. This pilot work aims to inform larger studies that will provide real-time information on illicit drug content and purity.

Discussions and Conclusions: Given the public-health harms documented in North America from the emergence of illicit high-potency opioids, it is critical that Australia be prepared to respond to similar threats locally. We have described an easily implementable surveillance system that also provides real-time harm-reduction opportunities to people who use opioids and the health professionals that provide services to them.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The findings presented will inform overdose response with naloxone for high-potency opioids. There are potential implications of monitoring for impurities in broader street-based drug markets in Australia.

Discussion Section: Dr Marianne Jauncey will facilitate a discussion that aims to understand the broader experiences with high potency opioids from symposium attendees. The aim is an interactive knowledge sharing approach where attendees will receive an update of the international picture, and a current research framework being developed in collaboration with MSIC and NDARC. At the same time the symposium presenters hope to learn what is occurring in other services and geographic locations represented by symposium attendees. There is opportunity for broader data collection through other health services, including NSPs and drug treatment services. The questions to the audience will include:

- how often and from what sources they are receiving reports of high potency opioids being used,
- first responder experiences with naloxone administration for high-potency opioids
- other harms being observed and harm reduction measures being taken.

Given the serious threat to public health that may be posed by the increasing availability of high potency opioids, it is hoped that the symposium presentation and discussions will inform a local response in Australia, including broader provision of naloxone and inform harm reduction strategies for high potency opioids.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

SN is a named investigator on untied educational grants from Indivior, and in the past she has been a named investigator on untied education grants from Reckitt-Benckiser. She has presented training workshops for Indivior where travel expenses have been covered, but no personal payment was accepted.