

Take-Home Naloxone (THN) and risk management among people who survived an opioid overdose

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A qualitative analysis informed by *drug, set and setting*

Conclusions:

This is the first study to highlight opioid overdose survivors' experiences of a new THN program in Sweden. The complex overdose circumstances reported by participants illustrate the intertwining effect of drug, set and setting.

THN has been incorporated into the handling of overdose emergencies, alongside traditional home remedies such as injecting stimulants and using cold showers.

Harm reduction interventions focused on individuals must be accompanied by structural changes in order to reduce overdose deaths.

N=22 | 73% men | mean age 39 | 68% homeless | primary drug: 64% opioids, 32% amphetamine, 4% other

Introduction

Sweden has one of the highest rates of overdose mortality in Europe. THN programs were introduced nationwide in 2018.

This qualitative study builds on international research that has expanded a previously narrow, medical focus on overdose deaths. It explores the role of naloxone among overdose survivors in a context of severe stigmatization of people who inject drugs.

Method

The study uses Zinberg's* theoretical framework to look beyond the role of the **drug** in order to include the attitudes and personality of the person (**set**) and contextual factors (**setting**).

We interviewed 22 individuals who had survived an opioid overdose, recruited from the clients of the Stockholm needle exchange. All participants had received naloxone in an overdose situation.

Thematic analysis was applied.

* Zinberg NE. *Drug, set and setting: the basis for controlled intoxicant use*. New Haven: Yale University Press; 1984.

You become quite indifferent to life under certain circumstances...I mean, I'm happy I'm alive, but I wouldn't be bothered if I checked out tomorrow either.

Almost always one of us was carrying naloxone, because we hung out together [...] If I didn't have it then someone else did.

So, she came home and overdosed again the day after. And then I only had one [naloxone] left. And that didn't help at all. So, I injected her with speed and that helped. She bounced right back again, thank God...that's how we used to do it, and it still works.

My friend didn't want the police there, so after [being revived with naloxone] I put my clothes on and I ran down to meet them in the staircase. They [the police] wanted to know which flat it was but I refused to tell them...I just said, "Let's go!" in order to get them away from there.

When I understood that he'd given me naloxone I got really angry and started to yell, I even gave him a slap in the face. So the poor guy started to cry. But then I understood that he didn't do it to be mean...

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