ODPRN ONTARIO DRUG POLICY RESEARCH NETWORK

RESEARCH MINUTE

May 2014

Deaths Related to Opioid Overdose in Ontario have Increased Substantially over the last 2 Decades

The number of people dying prematurely from an opioid-related death has increased approximately 3-fold over the past several years. Nearly one in eight deaths among young adults were observed over the study period.

What does this mean?

- Opioids are a group of prescription drugs that relieve pain, however previous research has shown them to be addictive and potentially dangerous, particularly in combination with other drugs (such as sedatives) and alcohol, or when taken by someone with no history of opioid use.
- Almost 1 in 8 deaths that occurred among individuals 25 and 34 year involved an opioid.
- Opioid-related deaths result in 21,927 years of potential life lost annually

Recommendations

- ✓ Be aware of the potential dangers of taking a prescription opioid.
- ✓ Contact your doctor with any questions regarding the safety of your opioid medication.

How do we know this?

The ODPRN conducted a serial cross-sectional study of all opioid-related deaths in Ontario between January 1, 1991 and December 31, 2010 using data abstracted from the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario. Patients were stratified into 7 age groups (0 to 14 years, 15 to 24 years, 25 to 34 years, 35 to 44 years, 45 to 54 years, 55 to 64 years, and 65 years or older). We identified 5,935 people whose deaths were opioid-related in Ontario. The median age at death was 42 years (interquartile range 34 to 50 years), 64.4% (N=3,822) of decedents were men and 90.0% (N=5,340) lived in an urban neighborhood. Rates of opioid-related death increased dramatically, rising 242% from 12.2 deaths per million in 1991 (127 deaths annually) to 41.6 deaths per million in 2010 (550 deaths annually; $p<0.0001$). In 2010, 1 out of every 170 deaths in Ontario was related to opioid use, and 1 in 8 of all deaths among individuals aged 25 to 54 involved an opioid. Opioid-related deaths result in 21,927years of potential life lost annually. In 2010, this exceeds the YLL attributable to alcohol use disorders, pneumonia, HIV/AIDS and influenza.

The ODPRN is funded by the Ontario Drug Innovation Fund to respond rapidly and directly to policy-makers' needs for relevant research. For more information about the ODPRN please visit our website www.odprn.ca