VOICE-Q Rural- Virtual Overdose Intervention Canadian Evaluation - Qualitative Study of People Who Use Substances in Rural, Remote, or Indigenous Communities

Category: Symposium Presentation

Abstract Body

As of 2022, nearly 20 drug-related deaths occur daily in Canada. These risks, however, may be mitigated with timely emergency support. Virtual supervised consumption services (VSCS) may reduce drug-related mortality risk by connecting people who use drugs (PWUD) to a harm reduction operator who can remotely monitor the callers' drug use and can activate an individualized emergency response plan during an adverse event. As VSCS are able to reach clients in rural/remote areas where emergency response may be longer or there are less harm reduction services, the perspectives of PWUD from these areas are needed to evaluate the acceptability of these services.

Objective: To explore the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of individuals surrounding VSCS, especially those living in rural/remote areas.

Methods: A qualitative study was conducted using grounded theory methodology. Adult residents of BC and Alberta, and had past or current experience of substance use were recruited using various virtual and in-person harm reduction services. Online verbal interviews were conducted following a semi-structured interview guide. Data was collected until saturation was reached. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

Results: Twelve participants (mean age=37.8 years, SD=10.8; n=12 (41.7%) male) were recruited from Alberta, BC, with 7 (58.3%) identifying as Indigenous.

Primary themes

i) VSCS can provide additional harm reduction or mental health supports, and the danger of using these services would be no greater than that of using alone, ii) concerns with ambulatory navigation and arrival times iii) intense feelings of stigma and personal/ familial reputation damage around using substances in a small community, iv) concerns about access to technology necessary to use VSCS, v) concern that people in active substance use may not be motivated to utilize VSCS, vi) supplementary and complementary support provided by concerned community members interested in preventing overdose deaths, particularly those with lived experience.

Conclusion: Most participants believed VSCS to be helpful for early detection of drug-related overdoses and as a mental health support. There were concerns surrounding the efficacy of VSCS use in rural/remote areas particularly with ambulatory navigation and response times. We hypothesize that VSCS which consider these navigational issues may be able to provide an acceptable intervention for mitigating drug-related deaths across Canada

Key Words

- Indigenous Groups
- Prevention/Harm Reduction
- Rural
- Stigma
- Substance Use Disorder (general)

Learning Objective # 1
1. Gain a better understanding of the ways in which technology is being used to mitigate overdose risk among rural/remote PWUD during the drug toxicity crisis.

Learning Objective # 2
2. Gain insight into the perspectives, concerns and priorities of rural/remote PWUD around harm reduction program implementation.

Reference # 1
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