Perspectives of healthcare workers on the integration of virtual overdose monitoring services in acute and primary care settings.

Category: Symposium Presentation

Abstract Body

Background: In the context of the dual public health emergency of the Covid-19 epidemic and overdose epidemic, virtual overdose monitoring services (VOMS) have emerged as an additional strategy for harm reduction in people who use drugs. This community has disproportionately higher rates of both interactions with the healthcare system and leaving against medical advice partially explained by a combination of stigma, withdrawal and improper pain management. Noting this we aimed to determine the feasibility of integrating VOMS within acute and primary care settings.

Method: We used purposive and snowball sampling to recruit 16 healthcare professionals to participate in semi-structured interviews completed by two evaluators. Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis informed by a grounded theory framework to identify key themes and subthemes. Results were then presented to a focus group to confirm the validity of the findings.

Results: Participants recognized VOMS as a feasible solution for increasing safety of people who use drugs in healthcare settings. Our results demonstrate mixed findings on the ability of these services to decrease stigma and build rapport. Participants further highlight barriers to implementation of these services including pre-established policies, legal recourse and coordination of emergency response. Lastly, participants highlight that VOMS should only be one part of a multifaceted approach to reducing harms in acute care settings.

Conclusion: VOMS presents a potentially feasible adjunct strategy for reducing the harms associated with illicit drug use in acute care settings; however more evidence based strategies like peer health workers and in-facility supervised consumption services should be prioritized.

Key Words

- Caring in Crisis
- Digital Therapeutics
- Equity, Diversity, Inclusion issues

- Legal Issues
- Novel Therapeutics
- Opiate Agonist Therapy
- Opioids/Opiates
- Policy
- Prevention/Harm Reduction
- Primary Care
- Stigma
- Stimulants
- Substance Use Disorder (general)
- Virtual Care
- Withdrawal Management
- Women/Pregnancy/Neonatal Issues

Learning Objective # 1

Understand the current need for innovative solutions to address the opioid crisis and substance use within acute and primary care settings.

Learning Objective # 2

Evaluate the current opportunities and challenges of integrating virtual overdose monitoring technology in acute and primary care settings.

Reference # 1

Ti L, Voon P, Dobrer S, Montaner J, Wood E, Kerr T. Denial of Pain Medication by Health Care Providers Predicts In-Hospital Illicit Drug Use among Individuals who Use Illicit Drugs. Pain Res Manag. 2015;20(2):84–8.

Reference # 2

Lombardi AR, Arya R, Rosen JG, Thompson E, Welwean R, Tardif J, et al. Overdose Detection Technologies to Reduce Solitary Overdose Deaths: A Literature Review. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2023 Jan 10;20(2):1230.

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