

# The role of Accident and Emergency Departments in Reducing Opiate Overdose Fatality.

## *A Cross Sectional Study in Brighton and Hove, UK.*

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### Background

Brighton and Hove has had one of the highest prevalence of drug related deaths in UK. Inquest data shows overdose as a predisposing factor prior to drug related mortality. This research established secure systems for the sharing of overdose (OD) information between A&E and the Drug and Alcohol Action Team. This enabled patient identifiable information to be shared with designated clinical staff within treatment services provide harm reduction interventions to reduce the risks of OD.

### Methods

The criteria for inclusion in this review were opiate overdoses presenting to the Royal Sussex County Hospital (RSCH) A&E department between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 24<sup>th</sup> October 2012. Clinical records were reviewed against a pro forma. This information was then cross referenced with that contained within the Drug and Alcohol Case Management System.

### Results

During the review period 38 individuals had a total of 44 opiate overdoses. Where information was recorded it was evident that most overdoses involved more than one substance (n=22). Heroin was mentioned in the notes 14 times and Methadone was mentioned seven times. Benzodiazepines were mentioned in relation to 12 overdoses. Two cases appeared to be deliberate overdoses. On reviewing the substance misuse notes there was evidence that three clients had had a recent discharge from prison. In total 27 of the 38 patients had been in contact with substance misuse services. Crucially, at the time of their overdose 13 of the patients who had been in contact with drug services had disengaged from treatment.

### Conclusion

A significant proportion of clients were not actively engaged in treatment at the time of their overdose and may not have received a Naloxone mini-jet as part of the existing prescribing programme for those in drug treatment. Clients who either disengage from treatment or who are only peripherally in contact with services are at greater risk of an overdose. Naloxone (Narcan) mini-jets are now being dispensed by A&E to patients presenting with an Opiate Overdose.

Patients who are not in treatment are not benefitting from therapeutic support for their substance misuse and may be in real danger of overdose and potential mortality. Assertive outreach is actively used to make contact with clients to re-engage with treatment. This research has shown the importance of using this approach with this client group.

Of the 38 individuals who experienced an overdose five (13%) were primarily users of alcohol. Four of these individuals had been in contact with treatment services. Naloxone mini-jets are now being distributed to selected clients in Alcohol Treatment.

For more information about this initiative please contact [Liz.tucker@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:Liz.tucker@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk)

#### Naloxone Prescribing in A&E

Brighton and Sussex University Trust is the first A&E department in the UK to dispense Naloxone mini-jets to patients admitted with an Opiate Overdose. Naloxone (Narcan) is a type of medicine called an opioid antagonist. It blocks the actions of opioid medicines and can reverse the effect of an overdose.