INCREASE OF SYNTHETIC OPIOID USE:
TWO EVIDENCE-BASED AND LOW TRESHOLD INTERVENTIONS TO PREVENT DRUG RELATED DEATHS

BACK-GROUND

Synthetic opioids are a major contributor to drug-related deaths in different countries *(2022, USA 68% of 107.941 drug-related deaths[1]; 2023, Canada 82% of 8.049 opioid-related deaths[2])*. The current European drug report shows that 20 countries in Europe are already confronted with synthetic opioids such as Nitazene and Fentanyl. Germany saw 2023 the highest number of drug-related deaths ever (2.227 cases). Synthetic opioids was registered in 76 cases[3]. **Two german studies** (Take Home Naloxone[4] and Rapid fentanyl testing[5]) **have proven measures for preventing opioid-related drug emergencies and drug deaths.**

DESCRIPTION

- RAFT (Rapid fentanyl Testing): The multi-centred study was carried out in 17 drug consumption rooms. With easy-to-use rapid tests, 1.405 heroin samples were tested. Users receive the result quickly, anonymously and have no loss of heroin. If the test is positive, fentanyl-related counselling is provided. The main goal was to raise awareness for fentanyl and support fact-based consumption decisions.
- NALtrain (Take Home Naloxone): It is a nationwide program that trains opioid users and employees in the use of naloxone and provides them with the medication in case of an emergency.

LESSONS

- RAFT Within 6 months, 3% of the samples tested positive for fentanyl. After fentanyl-related counseling, one in five users took advantage of harm reduction measures such as dose splitting.

- NALtrain Around 870 people were trained as multipliers in 74 training sessions by the end of 2023. Around 2.208 participants were provided with THN. 110 uses of naloxone were documented. No deaths were recorded.

CONCLUSION

Both projects shows that there is a great interest and willingness among employees and users to implement new, low-threshold and effective harm reduction measures.

BOTH INTERVENTIONS ARE HIGHLY EFFECTIVE IN PREVENTING DRUG EMERGENCIES AND DRUG-RELATED DEATHS.

In view of the fact that drug checking cannot be implemented politically in many countries, fentanyl rapid tests are one effective way of reducing harm. Take-home naloxone is an inexpensive life-saving medication that every user should be equipped with. Both projects are building blocks of effective and evidence based strategies that can be applied regardless of the economic status of the countries.

[1] NIDA, Online 14-07-2024
[2] Government of Canada, Online 14-07-2024
[3] Bundesdrogenbeauftragter, Online 14-07-2024
[4] further information: www.naloxontraining.de *)
[5] further information: www.drogenkonsumraum.de/raft *)
*) *in continous processing*

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