

The Role of EMTs in Preventing Overdose Deaths

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Purpose of Study

Drug overdoses can be a life-threatening emergency that requires quick and effective medical attention. Emergency medical technicians (EMTs) play a crucial role in responding to drug overdoses and providing lifesaving treatment to individuals in need. This poster will explore the role of EMTs in drug overdoses and their importance in improving outcomes for individuals who have overdosed.

Background

Prescription opioids (like hydrocodone, oxycodone, and morphine) and illegal opioids (like heroin and illegally made fentanyl) are powerful drugs that have a risk of a potentially fatal overdose. Death from an opioid overdose happens when too much of the drug overwhelms the brain and interrupts the body's natural drive to breathe.

Risk Factors for Overdose

Anyone who uses opioids can experience an overdose, but certain factors may increase risk including but not limited to:

- Combining opioids with alcohol or certain other drugs
- Taking high daily doses of prescription opioids
- Taking more opioids than prescribed
- Taking illicit or illegal opioids, like heroin or illicitly-manufactured fentanyl
- Certain medical conditions, such as sleep apnea, or reduced kidney or liver function
- Age greater than 65 years old

Assessment and Treatment

After making sure the person is stable, EMTs will assess the person's condition and determine the right treatment. This may involve taking the person to a hospital for further treatment or providing additional medical care on-site. EMTs are trained to recognize the signs of a drug overdose and to provide appropriate treatment, including administering medications or performing other lifesaving interventions for the patient.

Educating the Community

In addition to their role in responding to drug overdoses, EMTs also play an important role in preventing overdoses and educating the public about the risks of drug use. They may participate in community outreach programs, provide education on safe drug use and storage, and advocate for policies that can help reduce the incidence of drug overdoses.

Data

More than 932,000 people have died since 1999 from a drug overdose.¹ In 2020, 91,799 drug overdose deaths occurred in the United States. The age-adjusted rate of overdose deaths increased by 31% from 2019 to 2020.

Opioids—mainly synthetic opioids (other than methadone)—are currently the main driver of drug overdose deaths. 82.3% of opioid-involved overdose deaths involved synthetic opioids.

Opioids were involved in 68,630 overdose deaths in 2020 (74.8% of all drug overdose deaths).

Conclusion

EMTs play a critical role in responding to drug overdoses and providing lifesaving treatment to individuals in need. Their quick response, assessment, and treatment can help improve outcomes for individuals who have overdosed. Additionally, their role in prevention and education can help reduce the incidence of drug overdoses and improve overall public health outcomes.



Addressing the Disparity

In counties with more income inequality, overdose death rates for Black people were more than two times as high as in counties with less income inequality in 2020. Overdose death rates for younger American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women were nearly two times those of younger White women in 2020. Overdose death rates in older Black men were nearly seven times as high as those in older White men in 2020.



References

Data was obtained from:
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
PUBMED
WedMD
Mayo Clinic