A Pilot Study Assessing Client Understanding and Use of Fentanyl Test Strips for Harm Reduction

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Background

- In the United States, more than half of the 100,000 drug overdose deaths in the last year involved illicitly manufactured fentanyls (IMFs).  
- Federal funding may now be used to purchase fentanyl testing strips (FTS) to help prevent overdose deaths as of April 2021.  
- Recent pilot studies in Rhode Island have assessed perceptions and attitudes towards take-home FTS among young adults who use drugs.  
- This study is among the first in St. Louis, Missouri, to examine a person’s knowledge and understanding of FTS.

Objectives

- To assess treatment-seeking service users’ knowledge and understanding of IMFs and motivation to use FTS as a method of harm reduction to prevent opioid overdose.

Methods

Study Design:
• Interviewer-administered 20-item survey

Study Dissemination:
• Delivered verbally in-person and via phone
• Responses collected on the Qualtrics survey platform

Study Population:
• Clients actively engaged in residential and office-based treatment for a substance use disorder at a community mental health center in St. Louis, Missouri

Study Measures:
• Responses to questions about fentanyl, attitudes toward fentanyl and overdosing, understanding and motivation to use fentanyl test strips

Results

Graph 1: Fentanyl Knowledge and Understanding

Graph 2: Fentanyl Test Strip Knowledge and Understanding

Figure 1: What would you do if you had drugs laced with fentanyl? (Select all that apply)

Conclusion

- Most (73%) survey respondents would like to be able to detect if there is fentanyl in their drug before use, but only 17% indicated that they feel confident in their ability to use FTS.
- Respondents indicated greater concern for a friend overdosing compared to their own risk of overdose.
- People who primarily use non-opioid/stimulant drug products (methamphetamine, cocaine) are at even greater risk for IMF overdose and would likely benefit the most from increased access and education surrounding use of FTS.
- Our healthcare system must rapidly continue to explore and expand upon overdose prevention efforts, including access to FTS, as urgent action is needed to reduce the continued rise in overdose deaths in the US.