
DRUG DEATH MATTERS

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NATIONAL FORUM ON DRUG-RELATED DEATHS

The Forum has been listening to people working in the field to learn of opportunities where interventions to prevent death may occur. One such opportunity exists through hospital Accident and Emergency (A&E) Departments. The following is a summary of a presentation given to the Forum in April and provides some useful food for thought.

Presentation to the Forum by Dr Ruben H K Thanacoody, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary – ‘Drug-related deaths in Lothian and prior contact with hospital based services’ –

Dr Thanacoody’s study looked at the demographic details of drug-related deaths (excluding suicide) in the years 2003, 2004 and 2005 from Lothian and Borders police and also what prior contact had been made with hospital services in the catchment area of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary (ERI) within five years of death.

Of the 90 deaths in Lothian 75 were in the ERI catchment area, 53% had been seen in ERI within 5 years - 31 within 12 months. Of the 75 deaths 45 were admitted within 5 years, 21 were

admitted to toxicology with previous overdoses or self-harm and 41 attend A & E or were admitted to toxicology. There was a large group with multiple admissions.

In conclusion there are therefore opportunities, not only for gathering information, but also for intervention at the time of contact with the hospital. However, this requires a flexible and fully “joined-up” framework linking hospital, GP, prison service, drug action teams, addiction services and other services, and ways of identifying who should intervene when, and what form the intervention should take.

Service Users Forum – What’s in it for me?

“Having become a part of the Service Users Forum I have found it to be a great opportunity to use my personal experience and ability to get ‘word from the street’ directly fed back to the Drug Related Death Working Group, who I have seen pro-actively working with numerous agencies to reduce the number of Drug Deaths in Scotland.

The voice and knowledge of the service user has been recognised

as a critical part in helping to reduce these numbers. As an ex-service user, who has lost a loved one, and who has quite nearly become one of these statistics this is greatly encouraging.

Many issues have been raised by the Service Users Forum varying from children growing up in care, homelessness issues for the drug user, problems faced on release from prison, potential barriers in calling emergency services, substitute prescribing and many more.

The National Forum has arranged for experts from varying fields to attend our meetings to help answer some of these issues or at least to let us know where they stand on these.

Since attending these meetings I am much more confident and have a much better understanding of the expert services that are involved in Drug Deaths. In addition to these meetings I recently took part in the Naloxone Pilot in Glasgow with the aim of reducing the number of drug deaths in Scotland.

I can only see the Service Users Forum being a positive step forward in closing the gap of understanding between experts and service users; using the knowledge of both together we must strive to reduce these unnecessary deaths."

Katey and Jason, Service Users Forum

SIGN UP, SPEAK OUT!

Choose Life are calling for Scots to lift the lid on their emotions and sign a pledge be more open about their and others feelings in a bid to improve the nation's mental health and help prevent suicide.

People who abuse substances are one of the seven key priority groups outlined by Choose Life, the Scottish Executive's ten year strategy to help reduce suicide. Substance abuse is a key risk factor suicidal behaviour as many people who misuse substances can often be struggling with other problems, such as mental ill-health, deprivation and isolation.

Many people can find it difficult to talk about the problems and challenges they face in their lives; this can lead to problems getting worse and people's overall health and mental health deteriorating. Having the courage to speak out about your emotions, and also having the ability to sensitively listen and empathise with those seeking support, could help save a life.

Around two people each day die from suicide in Scotland and suicide can affect all ages, genders and cultures. To reflect this, Choose Life is calling for as many people as possible to support the pledge.

To sign up to pledge and confirm your support, you simply need to submit a head and shoulders photograph of yourself to Choose

Life. Visit www.chooselife.net/pledge to complete the submission form and take part!

All images received by **Monday 6th August** will be used to create a collage that will be unveiled to the public during **Suicide Prevention Week 10-17 September 2007**.

More information is available at www.chooselife.net/pledge, by emailing emma.davis@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or calling 0141 242 0355.

LANARKSHIRE NALOXONE PILOT

The Lanarkshire Naloxone Pilot is now well underway. Since February 18 frontline health additions staff, 16 clients and 12 'buddies' have been successfully trained in basic life support, the unconscious patient and administration of naloxone. As a result 27 naloxone kits have been distributed, 14 of them to clients.

The buddies who have attended the training have been a mixture of fellow users, partners, brothers and parents.

Well over half the participants have now been followed up successfully at their first 2-month post training interview. Plans for 2 more training courses are being finalised for August.

Formal results will hopefully be published in the new year.

UK TRENDS IN DEATHS ASSOCIATED WITH ABUSE OF VOLATILE SUBSTANCES 1971-2005 REPORT

The above report, published on 27th July, was released by the Division of Community Health Sciences and St George's, University of London. It shows that in 2005 there were 45 deaths in the UK associated with volatile substance abuse. This is the lowest annual total recorded since 1980. Four of these deaths occurred in Scotland. This represents a rise from 2004 which saw 1 death in Scotland. Upon release of the figures, Fergus Ewing MSP, Minister for Community Safety, commented:

"The increase in number of deaths is disappointing. Every avoidable death is a tragic waste of life. That is why we are committed to ensuring that everyone, including our young people, parents and retailers, are aware of the dangers of abusing products such as cigarette lighter refills, aerosol sprays and glue. Abusing these products can mean instant death at the first attempt or following many attempts.

I am pleased to support the work being taken forward by Re-Solv to raise awareness of the dangers associated with Volatile Substance Abuse. Through "Know The Score", we also make sure people can easily access information about VSA.

A national campaign providing information to retailers was rolled

out nationally in spring 2005 and later that year the Young Scot Proof of Age Standards Scheme (PASS) was launched, tightening enforcement of the 'no proof no sale' policy for retailers.

All thirty two local authorities are participating in the scheme and Young Scot expects to have issued around 500,000 PASS cards by the end of this year."

CONTACT

We welcome contributions to the newsletter from all areas and disciplines. These can be e-mailed to:

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Look out for Issue 4 in December 2007.