
DRUG DEATH MATTERS

Issue 7

July 2009

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Issue 7 of Drug Death Matters. This issue features: the regular update from the National Forum on Drug-related Deaths; news of a brand new website dedicated to naloxone; an article about Fife's latest drug death report; news of 'Training for Trainers' in Lothian; and an article about Overdose Prevention and Intervention Training in Perth and Kinross.

UPDATE FROM THE NATIONAL FORUM

The National Forum on Drug-related Deaths published its second report in June. Observations highlighted in the report included the following:

- There is no one single reason for these deaths, it is a combination of factors. That is why it requires a range of different actions and activities such as the expansion of overdose awareness training to key workers in services, including homelessness services.
- Services should pursue improved treatment options for people with mild to moderate substance misuse co-morbidity.
- There is a continuing need for all services, statutory and otherwise, to identify substance misuse issues to ensure that referral to

specialist service is considered and followed up.

The second report also highlighted some key achievements including:

- An increase in suicide training through joint working between ADATs and Choose Life teams.
- The launch of the National Drug Deaths Database on 1 January 2009.
- The introduction in prisons of improved training and prescribing practices.

In the coming months the Forum will concentrate on developing a work plan for the next year. It is expected that the following areas, highlighted in the second report, will be developed further:

- The Forum will continue to highlight the dangers of injecting drugs and of poly-drug use, especially when combined with alcohol. The increased use of cocaine and in particular its combination with alcohol will also be explored.
- Deaths among older drug users. A joint project by Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) and European partners will help the Forum identify key issues needing to be addressed in order to reduce the

number of deaths among this population.

- The Forum will look at the need for an information leaflet or other resource for the ambulance service for those who refuse treatment.
- How to develop first-aid training for the police to include information about drug overdoses and the factors that discourage early contact with emergency services.
- How to reinforce the fact the police are primarily interested in the preservation of life.
- How to record and monitor non-fatal overdoses, as lives may be saved by learning what prevented the death.

A copy of the Forum report can be downloaded at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/277489/0083303.pdf>

STOP PRESS! NALOXONE WEBSITE ON ITS WAY.

An exciting new website is set to be launched in the next few weeks. www.take-homenaloxone.com has been created by a small group of independent academics and healthcare professionals aimed at raising the awareness and profile of the use of Take-Home Naloxone as a mechanism for reducing drug-related death.

Whether you are a drug user, carer, policymaker or are working in the substance misuse field, www.take-homenaloxone.com provides a complete guide on the use of Take-

Home Naloxone as an overdose prevention tool. Site features include information on pharmacy, legal and criminal justice issues associated with Take-Home Naloxone as well as up-to-date research and an interactive map detailing Take-Home Naloxone activity across the world.

There will also be a forum where site visitors will have an opportunity to comment on the site and discuss issues surrounding Take-Home Naloxone.

One of the site creators, Dr. David Best of the University of the West of Scotland, added, "The THN website is an exciting new initiative that will provide a depository for up-to-date information and knowledge about the application of take-home naloxone and its measured effects, and will offer a forum for discussion and innovation. This will offer impetus and direction for those of us who have strived for years to develop Naloxone and to move our knowledge forward".

Look out for the official launch of the site in the next few weeks.

NEWS ALERT! SCOTTISH DRUGS FORUM HAS A NEW CRITICAL INCIDENTS TRAINING OFFICER

Stephen Malloy has been appointed as National Critical Incidents Training Officer with Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF).

Stephen is replacing Graham Mackintosh who has moved on after more than four years in this pioneering Scottish Government funded post aimed at helping to reduce drug-related deaths.

Stephen moves to SDF from a voluntary sector suicide crisis service in north Glasgow, where he was a suicide/self-harm intervention worker. His work there involved offering support and training in one-to-one and group settings with men and women assessed as being at high risk of suicide or who have been engaging in significant deliberate self-harm. Many of them had drug and/or alcohol problems.

In partnership with the national Suicide Prevention Strategy, Choose Life and others, Stephen also delivered training to front-line workers, family support groups, carers and others around suicide and self-harm issues. This involved him working with the multi-agency North Glasgow Suicide Prevention Steering Group and the local Workers Self-Harm Forum.

Stephen has also worked extensively in both east and west Glasgow with groups of men and women who were experiencing substance use and mental health problems. He worked to engage them in recovery-focused programmes, which he designed, involving: physical activity, diet and nutrition, self-image psychology and pre-employability skills training.

Stephen said, *"First-hand experience of substance use problems many years ago has helped me to recognise the various real and perceived barriers that exist to people overcoming drug and alcohol dependency. It is really important that we all strive to support and empower individuals to reach their potential and preventing people from dying through overdose is crucial to achieving that"*.

Stephen is based in the SDF's Mitchell Street premises in Glasgow but his remit will take him across Scotland. Anyone wishing to contact him to discuss training on how to prevent, respond to or raise awareness about overdose can contact him at stephenM@sdf.org.uk or by telephone 07920 133710.

MORE NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY read on.....

DRUG DEATHS IN FIFE – LATEST REPORT

The following article was provided by Rita Keyte of Fife Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT).

Fife DAAT recently published a report by the Fife Drug Death Monitoring and Prevention Group into the drug deaths that occurred in Fife in 2008. This follows on from the previous 3-year report which covered 2005-2007 deaths.

The report included data collection and analysis pertaining to the demographic, social, criminal offending, substance misuse, physical, psychiatric/psychological, service use characteristics and circumstances of drug deaths in Fife. Consequently, the findings have enabled the group to set forth recommendations, to facilitate the reduction of drug deaths and inform policy and practice at a local and national level.

There were 31 victims of drug deaths in Fife between January and December 2008. The mean age of the victims, mostly male, was 28 years. Many of the victims died as a result of using a mix of heroin, alcohol, methadone and tranquillisers. Most were also

physically and mentally unwell. Many of those who died were not socially isolated but still in touch with family and friends and most died in the company of friends and relatives. There are a number of recommendations in the report including:

- Providing overdose education and training about the risks of consuming the lethal cocktail of drugs and promoting awareness of the common signs of overdose.
- Encourage shared assessment and exchange information amongst users.
- Increased frequency of screening of people on a methadone programme to ascertain that associated poly-drug use will not increase the risk of overdose and develop more outreach work to access those who are particularly vulnerable and may be finding it difficult to attend services.

A PDF copy of the report can be downloaded from:

www.nhsfife.scot.nhs.uk/

DELIVERING 'TRAINING FOR TRAINERS' IN LOTHIAN

This article comes from Dave Carson, NHS Lothian.

The increase in the number of drug-related deaths in Lothian in recent years prompted a pilot Training for Trainers (T4T) day for specialist and non-specialist drug agencies and workers from the four local authority areas within Lothian.

T4T aim is to recruit, develop and sustain a network of trainers across the Lothian's who will provide advice, awareness and skills development to agency staff, drug

users and family and carers within their locality.

This involves delivering T4T on:

- Overdose Prevention and Intervention training;
- Basic life support;
- Sharing effective practice and information exchange; and
- Establishing a T4T peer network of trainers to build OD awareness.

A pilot T4T event was held in January. Twenty-two practitioners attended from homeless and hostel, specialist addictions services and enforcement.

The pilot T4T was well received and evaluated. Subsequent to this a further two T4T events will be developed and held during 2009/10.

The following is a quote from pilot evaluation: "*not very often you get the police, ambulance and drug agencies in the same place*".

PERTH AND KINROSS COMBATS DRUG DEATHS

The following is an article by Angie Simpson on behalf of the Perth and Kinross Service User Involvement Group.

As a reaction to the recent report by Figure 8 Consultancy, *Reducing Drug User's Risk of Overdose*, and the increasing drugs deaths in Perth and Kinross, the SDF development officer, using the skills of the Service User Involvement and Carers Forums, set-up a pilot scheme to roll-out Overdose Prevention and Intervention Training in the local area.

Six members of the Service User Forum and six agency staff were identified to undertake education in

the delivery of this training under the direction of the Service User and Carer Development Officer. The participation of both users and agency staff in the project would bring a unique perspective to the pilot scheme, the first of its kind to be done in Scotland, and would hope to have a "snowball effect".

The identified individuals underwent a 2-day training course, Training the Trainers Overdose Awareness, facilitated by SDF. They also underwent 'Heart Start' training delivered by the British Heart Foundation.

Since the completion of the training the group has organised four training sessions attended by over thirty participants. The groups targeted were:

- Individuals not currently engaged with services;
- Individuals who are homeless and have substance misuse problems;
- Parents with substance misuse problems; and
- Carers of individuals with substance misuse problems.

The anticipated outcomes of the pilot scheme are:

- Reduction in drug-related deaths in Perth and Kinross;
- Provide an educated, informed and confident agency workforce;
- Shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of both service users and service providers;
- Break down barriers to service provision;

- Increase self-esteem and confidence, employability, and personal development of service users;
- Engagement with 'hard to reach' groups.

The pilot scheme was subject to an evaluation of written feedback from the participants. This evaluation was further enhanced by determining the baseline knowledge of the participants before the training and comparing it to the feedback documents.

In addition, there will be follow-up interviews with the participants in the near future to determine the extent of the impact of the training.

The feedback from the participants was also valuable. Angie Simpson, Chair of User Involvement and a trainer in the pilot scheme remarked, "*I was surprised at the level of misunderstanding among users about the subject and the level of acceptance by them of many 'urban myths' on the subject*".

A formal report on the pilot scheme will be produced for the Perth and Kinross Alcohol and Drug Partnership in July 2009.

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE REVIEW

This article from Tom Jackson, Joint Manager, West Dunbartonshire Addiction Services focuses on work to reduce drug deaths in West Dunbartonshire.

After a general upward trend in drug-related deaths, in 2008 West Dunbartonshire appeared to hit a peak of 17 deaths (as yet unconfirmed total). Although an

action plan for challenging the upward climb in numbers was in place, local partners agreed to review the details of those who died in 2008 to try and better understand their circumstances and, if possible, identify any trends which might aid existing plans.

A small group was assembled including: police, treatment providers from statutory and voluntary sector services, social work and a GP. All known data was collected on each individual including the circumstances of the death and toxicology reports. Background data was brought together and a profile of each individual compiled.

The review identified expected characteristics; very few had sustained, if any, contact with local drug services. Most were not alone at the time of death and all had complex histories. It was also not surprising that while most individuals had limited contact with specialist drug services, a high percentage (59%) had relatively recent contact with the Criminal Justice service and/or Welfare Services.

It was slightly surprising that more than half had documented histories of heavy alcohol use (53%), but the most startling detail was the number who were known to services as individuals with an alcohol problem (41%), and were neither considered drug users nor in any way assumed at risk of a drug overdose.

Interpreting the review poses challenges. The numbers are relatively small so the evidence is not statistically strong. There is also a need to review other years to determine if 2008 is in any way an unusual year in terms of the deaths.

Time has been spent understanding the context of chronic drinkers who die of a drug overdose. In every instance for this group, the death was a combination of alcohol and opiates, and sometimes tranquilisers. Each story though, pieced together from the details of police reports and witness accounts, was unique. For some individuals the use of heroin or methadone, while not a regular activity, was not a first. For others the situation which led to their consumption of opiates was unique. What was clear was the easy cross-over between the worlds of alcohol and drug misuse, and not just among the younger cohort (the youngest of the primary alcohol users was 28 and the average age of this group was 42.7).

There was ease of access to heroin and other drugs and personal associations with drug users.

There remains the task of refining existing plans, to ensure we reach those at risk and provide audience specific information. Plans are already underway to reach out to those not engaging with drug services, working with Criminal Justice and Welfare Rights services.

The current task involves developing how to approach those engaged with alcohol services to consider their own risk of a drug overdose. Within that task, targeted materials are required. Upon review, it was possible to identify materials designed for drug users warning of the risk of mixing alcohol with heroin. What the group has struggled to identify are materials designed for heavy drinkers, highlighting the risk of using heroin or methadone on top.

In the absence of identifiable materials, local work on production is underway involving service providers and service users. Local actions continue to address factors leading to drug-related deaths, now with one more component.

CONTACT

We welcome contributions to the newsletter from all areas and disciplines. These can be e-mailed to ian.somerville@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Look out for **Issue 8** in December 2009.