The Links between Opioid Use, Overdose, and Suicide

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A recent review described what is known about the link between unintentional overdose and suicide and provided recommendations for addressing both public health problems simultaneously.

Rates of suicide and unintentional overdose in the U.S. have continued to climb over the past two decades. Opioid use has a clear and direct relationship to the risk of unintentional overdose and a similar link to suicide risk. While articulating the pathway between opioid use and unintentional overdose and suicide has been challenging, shared prevention approaches clearly offer promise.

For example, several research teams have developed tools that use electronic health records to calculate a specific patient’s level of risk for unintentional overdose, suicide, or both. Targeted clinical interventions can then be used based on a patient’s risk level. Cognitive behavioral therapy is one potential approach, because it shows strong evidence of reducing suicide risk and promise in reducing risk of unintentional overdose. Improving quality of pain care, such as increasing access to medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorders, may also reduce rates of suicide and overdose.

Because opioid use plays a critical role in suicide and unintentional overdose, interventions that address this risk factor may be effective and efficient solutions to both.


Links within this resource
[1] https://youtu.be/NAIMnDQXfLo