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<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6z05386d>

Authors

Yassin, Lamis

Duong, Mindy

Bravo, Kyo

et al.

Publication Date

2024-12-23

Opioid and Drug Dependence On University Campuses

Leads: Lamis Yassin and Mindy Duong

Group Members: Lamis Yassin, Mindy Duong, Kyo Bravo, Ella Kaufman, Emily Qian, Josie Philips, Yune Lee, Edith Castellanos, Alyson Nobriga

I. ABSTRACT

The prevalence of opioid use disorder and overdose is continually growing on college campuses. Unfortunately, most university staff are not properly equipped to handle this reality. This can lead to devastating impacts to university students, staff, and families. Reality is, staff members need to be equipped to help and manage students in life threatening situations related to opioid use. This proposal aims to directly tackle this issue through a mandated drug overdose response procedure certification. This would be a requirement for university resident assistants, RAs, and security staff. This would be a requirement for public universities and staff would take the course during the onboarding process with a yearly review course. A solution like this can save many lives and allow for a safer campus that will further academic and personal success. The proposal will require funding for curriculum building, reimbursement for staff that undergo the training, and purchase of naloxone kits.

II. BACKGROUND

Opioids are natural or synthetic chemicals that interact with opioid receptors in the brain to reduce the perception of pain. Prescriptions are meant to treat acute pain, chronic pain, and assist with end-of-life care. Common side effects are drowsiness, euphoria, nausea, and at high doses can slow breathing which leads to death.

According to the USDA, in 2020, the rate of drug overdose deaths increased by 31% compared to 2019. In addition to this, two years later, in 2022, there were 81,806 opioid-involved overdose deaths in the US. The number of opioid and drug-related deaths is alarming, especially considering that approximately 3-19% of people who use prescription drugs containing opioids develop Opioid Use Disorder (OUD). The lack of opioid-specific rehabilitation programs makes it difficult for those suffering from addiction to seek treatment. Additionally, OUD develops quickly and has a stronger physical dependency than most other drugs, highlighting the severity of increasing drug overdose deaths in America.

III. PROBLEM

The United States currently has an opioid overdose crisis, with over 80,000 deaths each year being attributed to opioid-related causes. Specifically, in the same year in California, over 7,000 individuals died from opioid overdoses, and over 85% of these deaths involved opioids combined with fentanyl. Among college students over the past two decades, there was a 343% increase in the use of prescription opioids like oxycontin. Beyond this, the second most common

form of drug use for U.S. college students is the nonmedical usage of aforementioned prescription opioids, behind marijuana. Currently, there is a lack of education and information regarding opioids for adolescents, especially as they become cheaper and more mainstream. As opioid use becomes increasingly prevalent in the drug supply, especially in forms combined with other synthetic drugs, their misuse is also increasing. Furthermore, economic pressure and lack of access to healthcare can lead individuals to attempt self medicate which can lead to incorrect dosing and further opioid dependence.

IV. SOLUTION

This proposal mandates a national requirement for university resident assistants (RAs) and security staff to receive an opioid antagonist administration certification. All certification programs must be approved or executed by the Department of Health in the respective state. Resident assistant certification must be administered during training. Security staff must be previously certified within the last year by an approved program, or receive approved training within one month of hiring. All trained individuals must attend an annual refresher training dependent on the storage and utilization of the antagonist medication. Universities may choose to host certification programs virtually or in-person, depending on the budgeting allocations and university needs.

The use of the medication naloxone, an opioid antagonist commonly known as Narcan, is incredibly effective in reversing an opioid overdose if administered properly, with 89% of overdoses being successfully reversed in a San Francisco-based study. However, availability of naloxone is arguably equally important to proper education and training on how to use it. All student living accommodations should have naloxone on site and accessible to RAs. Security staff should also have access to naloxone when on duty.

Training programs for the administration of naloxone, along with recognizing the signs of overdose, have been shown to improve participants' awareness and comfort level with naloxone usage. This can empower and aid RA's and university staff in effectively addressing the growing risk of opioid misuse and overdose on college campuses.

This solution can impact the lives of millions of college students in the state of California to ensure their safety in case of an overdose emergency. Because young adults can be vulnerable to the pressures of opioid misuse and overdose, implementing standardized training can create a more supportive environment where students feel that their wellbeing is a priority. With security staff getting approved training, they will be properly equipped to help individuals at risk for opioid usage, such as in concerts and festivals and also in public settings on the street. By requiring proper training, we can safeguard individuals from the opioid epidemic that endangers the future of millions, and also reinforce the importance of opioid usage education and awareness as well as the importance of individual responsibility.

V. PRECEDENT

Several legislative bills have previously been passed to implement analogous legislation. A variety of these bills will be subsequently listed below.

SB 726 (PASSED)

- “The bill provides for the disciplinary, civil, and criminal immunity of an employee of a public school... for any act or omission made in connection with the good faith administration of an opioid antagonist for the purposes of opioid overdose reversal”
- Each public school board must establish programs for opioid overdose prevention and reversal that requires the following:
 - Secondary school to provide instruction on overdose prevention and reversal before graduation
 - Stocking at least two doses of opioid antagonists at every elementary school and secondary school
 - Training and certification of employees to administer opioid antagonists, with at least one certified employee per school.
- Certified employers and school boards are granted legal immunity for administering opioid antagonists in good faith
- School boards are required to adopt policies ensuring compliance with the bill. Therefore, partnering with the Department of Health for training and certification programs
- This implementation of this bill is mandatory for the 2025-2026 school year

CA AB3271 (Halted)

- “The bill required that public schools maintain at least two units of naloxone hydrochloride or another opioid antagonist, ensuring they are prepared for opioid overdose emergencies, but its advancement was halted in the Appropriations Committee.”
- Purpose: enhance student safety by equipping public schools to respond to opioid overdoses effectively
- Requirements:
 - Public schools must stock at least two doses of naloxone hydrochloride or a similar opioid antagonist
 - Designated school personnel must be trained and certified to administer opioid antagonist
 - Schools must implement opioid overdose prevention initiatives
- This bill has not advanced and was stalled in May 2024

HB 4367 (PASSED)

- "An agency that purchases, possesses, or distributes an opioid antagonist under section 103, and an employee or agent that possesses or in good faith administers an opioid antagonist under section 105, is immune from civil liability for injuries or damages arising out of the administration of that opioid antagonist to an individual under this act."
- Allows government agencies and their employees or agents to purchase, possess, and administer opioid antagonists, such as naloxone, to address opioid overdoses
- Employees or agents must be trained in the proper administration of opioid antagonists. They are authorized to administer the antagonist if they believe an individual is experiencing an opioid-related overdose
- Agencies and employees administering opioid antagonist in good faith are granted immunity from civil liability or criminal prosecution, except in cases of negligence

SB 10 (PASSED)

- "The bill would state the intent of the Legislature that a school use alternatives to a referral of a pupil to a law enforcement agency in response to an incident involving the pupil's misuse of an opioid."
- Encourages county offices of education to establish "County Working Groups on Fentanyl Education in Schools" for outreach, awareness, and collaboration with local health agencies. Requires the State Department of Education to maintain and provide informational resources on opioid overdose prevention for school staff, students, and families.
- Mandates that comprehensive school safety plans for grades 7-12, incorporate protocols for addressing suspected opioid overdoses
- States legislative intent to use alternatives to law enforcement referrals for students misusing opioids –MTTS
- Provides that if state-mandated costs arise, reimbursement will be made according to California's statutory provisions for local agency funding

MATE Act (Passed)

- Mandates a one-time, eight-hour training for all DEA-registered practitioners to address the treatment and management of patients with opioid or substance use disorders
- Aims to equip healthcare workers with the necessary knowledge to manage opioids-related cases effectively and promote safer prescribing practices

VI. FISCAL ANALYSIS

The proposal requires a mandated certification course and mandated access to naloxone in all university student living accommodations. This will require funding for curriculum building, reimbursement for staff that undergo the training, and purchase of naloxone kits. With the option for universities to choose to have an in person class or an online course, funding will be variable. The university has the right to request funding from the state in the event that they are unable to adequately fund the course themselves.

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