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Opioid Overdose Reversal Kits

Testing the provision of naloxone to reentrants

Agency: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC) Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP)

Trial Duration:
10/12/18–08/19/19

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Context
High rates of opioid-overdose death persist across the U.S. Providing or easing access to OD-reversal kits is a widely implemented strategy and may be particularly effective for those returning to the community after incarceration.

Key Finding
No data for OD events were available. No statistically significant results were found for secondary outcomes (recidivism, illicit drug use) between those who did and did not receive an opioid-OD-reversal kit.

*BetaGov provides ongoing training to agency personnel to become research-savvy "Pracademics" who can lead trials.

Background

Unintentional opioid overdoses are a significant problem in the United States, and overdose education and provision of opioid OD-reversal kits (naloxone) are approaches to address this epidemic. Community-based programs have offered overdose-prevention education and distributed naloxone for bystander administration to people who OD on opioids.

Naloxone to fight opioid-related mortality may be particularly relevant to the prevention of opioid-overdose deaths in people with opioid-use histories who have recently been released from prison. For those with opioid use disorder, reentry into the community brings heightened risk as opioid OD is more likely when opioid use is resumed after a period of non-use.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC) conducted a trial to test whether OD-reversal kits distributed to reentrants reduce OD events and secondary events such as recidivism and drug use.

Design

State Correctional Institutions Albion, Cambridge Springs, Chester, and Muncy participated in this trial. Persons in the participating facilities who met eligibility criteria were offered the possibility of receiving a Narcan kit (intranasal naloxone). As there was a limited number of kits, volunteers were randomly assigned to receive a kit (intervention) or not (control). Inclusion criteria included release to community supervision within 30 days and refusal of pre-release treatment with Vivitrol.

All reentrants were shown a video on OD and the use of OD-reversal kits. At release, intervention participants received kits, and all participants received educational information on drug use and OD-reversal kits.

Participants were tracked for six months after release to assess ODs, re-arrests, and drug use. Secondary outcomes of drug use and recidivism were identified as potentially related to OD events. Recidivism is defined as either re-arrest or re-incarceration to DOC custody within the tracking period. Drug use is defined as a positive urine-toxicology test for any illicit drug.

Lessons Learned

The project design included plans to track overdoses using ODIN, a statewide OD-tracking database, but it was discovered that data were not available to identify trial participants. Information was collected for 99 participants, 90% (n=88) of whom were female.

The six-month recidivism rate did not differ across groups; 13.7% of the intervention group and 12.5% of the control group were re-arrested in the tracking period. Drug use also did not differ by group; the six-month drug-use rate was 25.5% for the intervention group and 37.5% for the control group. No specific analysis of opioid use was conducted given the small percentage of such use during the trial.

Next Steps

Efforts to obtain OD information are ongoing in order to understand whether having an OD-reversal kit will reduce OD events. Additional exploration of the difference in OD-kit acceptance between males and females will be conducted to determine whether the acceptance rate is a reflection of the facility staff and cultures or attributable to differences between men and women reentrants.

Why BetaGov Spark?

Sometimes a rigorous trial of an innovative idea just isn't possible, but with a Spark project a practitioner can learn important information about the idea, the agency, and the sample. What's more, a positive signal may inform a future randomized controlled trial and more definitive results. Spark projects meet Pracademics where they are comfortable—giving them the opportunity to learn about research and apply that learning to internal research projects.