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Suicide by Opioid

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Categories: Pain Management, Substance Use and Addiction
Keywords: chronic pain, opioid use disorder, suicide

How to cite this poster

Pergolizzi J, Cortes L, Magnusson P, et al. (2021) Suicide by Opioid . Cureus 13(9): e.

Abstract

Suicide is one of the top 10 causes of death in the United States and other developed nations. In 2017, 40% of all suicide deaths by overdose involved an opioid [2]. Drug overdose mortality increased by 137% from 2000 to 2014 [3]. Opioid overdose mortality in specific increased from 10.9 per 100,000 in 2010 to 19.5 per 100,000 in 2015 [4]. Public health interventions addressing the opioid overdose crisis have been directed primarily toward treating opioid use disorder (OUD) and have largely ignored the plausible link between opioid use and suicidality. The link between opioid misuse and suicide is complicated by the fact that people with access to opioids often have chronic pain, which is a risk factor for suicide in and of itself. While overall national opioid dispensing rates have dropped, many counties remain higher than six times the national average, labeling them as “hotspots”. The purpose of this paper was to better understand the links between suicide and opioids, an important subject not well addressed in dealing with opioid use.