

Averting increasing drug overdose in India

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Introduction: Drug overdose is a growing public health concern in India among opioid users, with repeated drug overdose and associated death requiring urgent action. The latest National Crime Records Bureau report indicated gradual rise in reported overdose death among drug users. Besides, recently media reported drug overdose deaths on the rise in the states of Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka. Adding to the fatal drug overdose, a recent study indicated growing number of non-fatal drug overdose in India, indicative of growing future opioid overdose related morbidity among drug users.

Aim and methodology: This paper aims to understand the dimension of overdose incidences among drug users and the public health concerns that the issue poses for the country. Through review of recently published government reports, study papers and media reports of the last five years, the article also attempts to suggest way forward to tackle the overdose related morbidity and mortality among drug users, given the fact that existing stigma over drug use and knowledge dearth on preventive intervention of drug overdose compound the problem.

Conclusion: Death following opioid overdose is preventable if the person receives basic life support and the timely administration of the opioid blocker drug. An important part of drug overdose prevention efforts understands the trends and regional and demographic differences that may exist and thus strategize for both population and individual level interventions. There is general face validity of the concept that an ounce of prevention is better than cure. For India, the way forward for the purpose requires policy level thrust in the area of making available opioid antidote Naloxone all harm reduction targeted intervention and opioid substitution therapy centers, training of volunteers of specially launched National campaign in 272 vulnerable districts on recognizing overdose and providing first aid measures and scaling up opioid substitution therapy centers, among others.

Keywords: Opioid drugs, Overdose, Intravenous drug use, Naloxone.

Biography

Gautam Ghosh is a Consultant (earlier worked as Research Scientist in the Virology Department) National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases, Indian Council of Medical Research, Kolkata, West Bengal, India and National Consultant-cum-Master Trainer on harm reduction under the National AIDS Control Organization under Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, India. He is also attached voluntarily to a treatment-cum-rehabilitation center for people suffering with substance use disorder; and a front-line activist for prevention of alcoholism and substance misuse in the east and north-eastern India. He has his original research paper published in indexed national and international journals.

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