Heroin and Other Opiate Deaths Increasing

Heroin and fentanyl deaths in Miami-Dade County escalated in 2015 as overdoses and addiction treatment admissions for the non-medical use of prescription opioids continued to increase. Thus, the national Heroin and Opiate Pandemic has emerged locally as an Epidemic of Opiate Deaths in Miami-Dade County.

In 2015 there were 80 heroin-related deaths in Miami-Dade County up from 42 in 2014. There were also 94 deaths related to fentanyl and/or a fentanyl analog, common adulterants or substitutes for street heroin, representing more than a four-fold increase from the 22 fentanyl deaths in 2014. A critical factor in the escalation of heroin deaths both nationally and in Florida is that the drug is now often laced with the powerful opioid, fentanyl, generally produced in clandestine labs from Mexico or China. The fentanyl adulterants increasingly may be the only substance detected in alleged street heroin sales. Fentanyl is a Schedule II narcotic widely used as an analgesic and anesthetic. It is the most potent opioid available for use in medical treatment. Fentanyl is potentially lethal, even at very low levels. Doses as small as 0.25 mg can be fatal. Its euphoric effects are indistinguishable from morphine or heroin. Fentanyl and its various analogues from clandestine labs are up to 100 times more powerful than morphine and 30-50 times more powerful than heroin.
The number of deaths related to one of four different prescription opioid pain relievers (oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, and methadone) totaled 244 overdoses in Miami-Dade County during 2014. The number of such overdose occurrences is not yet available for 2015. There have been also more than 400 non-fatal prescription opioid poisoning overdose hospital admissions in Miami-Dade County annually over the past 5 years. Thus, Miami-Dade is averaging more than 2 opiate overdoses per day with more than half of them being fatal.

Primary addiction treatment admissions for heroin in Miami-Dade County private treatment programs increased 77-percent between 2014 (n=466) and 2015 (n=823). Admissions for addiction to a prescription opioid escalated 466-percent between 2014 (n=231) and 2015 (n=1,261).

Source: Florida Department of Children and Families
Opiate treatment admissions (heroin plus opioids) tripled from 11 percent of admissions for all substances (including alcohol) in 2014 to 33 percent in 2015.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health projects that there are 70,800 nonmedical users of prescription pain relievers in Miami-Dade and 7,000 heroin users.

The US Center for Disease and Prevention reported in January 2016 that the Opiate Pandemic is impacting every county in the United States based on overdose deaths in 2014. There are now more deaths due to drug overdose poisonings nationally than fatalities from traffic accidents.

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