

# Health Awareness

## Rescue Medications And Treatment: Why Both Are Critical To Addressing America's Opioid Epidemic

Ⓢ

(NAPSA)—Tragic stories of opioid abuse, dependence and lives lost to overdose emerge each day in communities across the country. Opioid pain relievers and heroin are responsible for an increasing number of drug overdose-related deaths in the U.S., with more than 28,000 deaths involving prescription opioids and heroin in 2014, up from approximately 24,000 deaths in 2013.<sup>1</sup>

In response, elected state officials are advocating to equip first responders, including local law enforcement and health professionals, with naloxone to treat an overdose in an emergency situation. Naloxone is a “rescue drug” that can be administered as a nasal spray or injection to counter the effects of opioid overdose.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of states now have laws in place providing medical professionals clearance to prescribe or dispense naloxone to community and family members concerned that a loved one may overdose. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) recently announced that it is accepting applications from states for \$55 million in grant funding to provide first responders training and access to naloxone.<sup>3</sup>

Although medical professionals in different parts of the country view naloxone as a valuable tool for saving lives in emergency scenarios, some caution that it cannot replace ongoing treatment and recovery support for those struggling with opioid abuse.

“There will not be any opportunity to provide a person who has overdosed a meaningful course of treatment if they don’t survive the day,” explained Dr. Torin Finver, Director of Addiction Medicine Fellowship Training at the University at Buffalo Jacobs School of Medicine. “Rescuing that person gives them a second chance at life. Getting them into treatment increases the chances that the life they will lead will be happy and healthy from that point forward.”

Katie Downey, a licensed clinical social worker who provides psychosocial support to those struggling with addiction at Cross Roads Agency in Western Massachusetts, echoes Dr. Finver’s sentiments. “Rescue therapy is a valuable tool to reverse an overdose, but we can’t rely solely on rescuing those who are addicted. Instead, we want to treat them and help them recover before they reach that breaking point again,” she said.

Without intervention, many who have overdosed and survived will revert back to lives of addiction. Research has shown that combining medication with psychosocial support is a comprehensive way to help patients with addiction, and including medication with psychosocial support is now considered the optimal evidence-based approach to treatment.<sup>4</sup> Treatment should be tailored to the patient’s needs by offering all available treatment options, including naltrexone, buprenorphine and methadone, and psychological support such as cognitive or behavioral therapy.<sup>5</sup> Some medications, such as buprenorphine and methadone, mimic opioid use. Other options, such as naltrexone, block the effects of opioids.<sup>6</sup>

“Access to medication-assisted therapies can be particularly valuable in the aftermath of an overdose when patients are vulnerable to relapse to opioid dependence,” Dr. Finver said. “These therapies that address the physical changes addiction causes in the brain can help guide patients on an enduring path to recovery.”

For more information about opioid dependence and treatment, please visit [www.recoveryispossible.com](http://www.recoveryispossible.com).

1 Number and age-adjusted rates of drug-poisoning deaths involving opioid analgesics and heroin: United States, 2000–2014 (Publication). (2016). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/health\\_policy/AADR\\_drug\\_poisoning\\_involving\\_OA\\_Heroin\\_US\\_2000-2014.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/health_policy/AADR_drug_poisoning_involving_OA_Heroin_US_2000-2014.pdf)

2 Drug Overdose Immunity and Good Samaritan Laws. (2016, April 12). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <http://www.ncsl.org/research/civil-and-criminal-justice/drug-overdose-immunity-good-samaritan-laws.aspx>

3 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2016, March 29). SAMHSA is accepting applications for up to \$55 million in grants to prevent prescription drug/opioid overdose-related deaths. [Press release]. Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <http://www.samhsa.gov/newsroom/press-announcements/201603291100>

4 Power, E.J., Nishimi, R.Y., & Kizer, K.W. (2005). Evidence-Based Treatment Practices for Substance Use Disorders. National Quality Forum. Retrieved from [http://www.apa.org/divisions/div50/doc/Evidence\\_Based\\_Treatment\\_Practices\\_for\\_Substance\\_Use\\_Disorders.pdf](http://www.apa.org/divisions/div50/doc/Evidence_Based_Treatment_Practices_for_Substance_Use_Disorders.pdf)

5 NASADAD Fact Sheet on Opioids. (2015). Retrieved May 19, 2016, from <http://nasadad.org/2015/02/nasadad-releases-fact-sheet-on-opioids>

6 Cavacuiti C. (Ed.). (2011). Principles of Addiction Medicine: The Essentials. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.