

## Provider Notice

To: **All Providers**  
From: **PerformCare**  
Date: **June 06, 2024**  
Subject: **AD 24 107: Overdose Risk**

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Over the past few years, PerformCare has identified a trend of Members in recovery from opioid addiction experiencing a deadly overdose. In multiple cases, Members were no longer engaging in substance use treatment, but were receiving Mental Health Outpatient (MH OP) services only. For almost all the Members, there was a documented increase in life/relationship stressors before the overdose occurred. Despite a significant substance use history, the MH OP therapist was no longer assessing or checking in regarding the Member's substance use even in these times of increased stressors.

Research indicates that individuals in recovery are at increased risk of overdose. Studies show that individuals released from prison have increased rates of death, particularly for opioid overdose, and those rates are increased for individuals who are experiencing mental health or substance use treatment needs<sup>1</sup>. Studies found that individuals leaving 'compulsory care' had a more than doubled risk of death in the first two weeks after discharge, due in large part to a reduced tolerance after a period of abstinence<sup>2</sup>.

Opioid use is tied to physical dependence, tolerance, and for some individuals, addiction. Chronic use leads to tolerance, leading to the need for increased amounts of the drug to achieve the same effects. **However, in someone with an addiction to opioids, relapse is likely, and if they return to using the same amount, the risk of a fatal overdose is significant, because they no longer have tolerance<sup>3</sup>.**

Therapists should be aware of this increased risk and ensure any Member at risk for overdose understands the potential for overdose with a relapse. Some ways to mitigate this risk include:

- Refer Members for MOUD (medications for opioid use disorder) treatment.
- Educate Members and their support system of the risk of relapse.
- Educate Members and their support system on the concept of the development of tolerance and the risk of fatal OD with abrupt return to dosages used previously.
- Educate Members and their support systems on naloxone.
- Complete thorough crisis and/or relapse prevention plans—identify the triggers and stressors that can lead to relapse and ensure there are sufficient coping mechanisms in place. For Members with a history of opioid addiction, all plans (whether they are labeled a crisis plan, wellness plan, or relapse prevention plan) should include triggers to use, since there is the potential to have a crisis situation.

- Check in with Members on their coping mechanisms, especially when external stressors are increasing. Review relapse prevention planning during these periods.

Below are articles referenced above that can be accessed for additional information:

1. Hartung, D.M. McCracken, C. M., Nguyen, T., Kempany, K., & Waddell, E.N. Fatal and nonfatal opioid overdose risk following release from prison: A retrospective cohort study using linked administrative data. *Journal of Substance Use and Addiction Treatment*, Vol 147. April 2023.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2949875923000218?via%3Dihub>

2. Ledberg, A. & Reitan, T. Increased risk of death immediately after discharge from compulsory Care for substance abuse. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, Vol. 236. 2022.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0376871622002290>

3. Kumar, V. (2016, June). *Former opioid users are at a greater risk of overdosing than the newly addicted*. The Jaxson Laboratory. <https://www.jax.org/news-and-insights/jax-blog/2016/june/former-opioid-users-at-greater-risk-of-overdose-than-newly-addicted>

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