

Treating Drug Users in an Accident & Emergency Setting

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Managing the Situation

- Too often, drug users reluctant to access Emergency Services due to fear of withdrawal and lack of pain management
- Too often, Emergency Services fail to address issue of withdrawal and pain in Drug Users
- Understanding Risk is Key to Success
- Crisis can be key factor to aid in accessing treatment

Assessing for Withdrawal

- Simple assessment for indicators of withdrawal upon presentation at hospital
- Verification if patient is on a prescription
- Risk Assessment: Will the patient stay for treatment if assistance with pain or withdrawal is not forthcoming?
- Is there an assumption of drug-seeking behaviour?

Assessing for Pain

- Far better to treat both pain and withdrawal in order to effectively treat primary problem
- Evidence base of *increased* sensitivity to pain caused by opiate dependency¹
- Pain, though more difficult to assess, is a very vital issue
- Higher doses of shorter acting opiates may be necessary, keep Narcan on hand as precautionary measure

1. Laulin, Simmonet, Woolf...

Retention of At-Risk Patients

- Understand reluctance of users to present to A&E
- If the patient has the courage to present for treatment, Orange Guidelines do state that treatment for Abstinence Syndrome, particularly if it is interfering with treatment of primary problem, *is indicated*

Retention of At-Risk Patients: Addressing the Problem *Realistically*

- Many drug users may present very late in onset of symptoms due to fear of hospital staff attitudes
- Many drug users will bring in their own drugs if they think treatment for abstinence and pain will be withheld
- Better to know exactly what the patient has taken rather than have to guess at what may be used 'on top.'

Breaking Down the Barriers

- Acknowledge that pre-conceptions on both sides can keep patients from presenting
- The longer a patient delays presenting, the more serious the risk to the life of the patient
- Empathy, Congruence, and Unconditional Positive Regard are key factors in preventing life-threatening situations from becoming worse

The Way Forward: Creating Trust

- Foster an environment that encourages users to access urgent care services; one successful interaction will create trust within using social networks
- Provide Drugs Awareness training to A&E Staff
- Ensure that each patient is treated individually

The Way Forward: Opportunities to Access Treatment

- Integrated Treatment - Models of Care Tier 1 Services: Non-substance misuse specific services requiring interface with drug and alcohol treatment
- Urgent care often first point of access for drug users; crises can often precipitate change, create motivation
- Triage Assessment and Onward Referral Pathways should be designed
- Designated Worker(s) put in place to act as advocates and encourage engagement with services