

## Pharmacists can help provide access to much-needed naloxone

According to CDC, nearly 50,000 people died from an opioid-involved overdose in 2019, and this number jumped to about 100,000 deaths in 2020.

Why are opioid-related deaths on the rise? The answer involves many factors, including reduced access to medications for substance use disorder, an increase in drugs contaminated with fentanyl, and, notably, limited naloxone for the patients who need it most. It is estimated that bystanders are present in more than one in three overdoses involving opioids. These individuals can assist patients in need, and pharmacists can help ensure that naloxone is getting into the right hands.

This month's *Pharmacy Today* cover story provides the latest on community-based harm reduction programs and their role in decreasing opioid overdose deaths. These largely untapped resources are increasingly in the spotlight since a recent FDA exemption for distributing naloxone made it easier for harm reduction groups to get it. This is a vital piece of the puzzle.

Community-based program workers are on the front lines to reverse an opioid overdose with naloxone, and

pharmacists can help increase access to naloxone in these programs. Stocking accessible and affordable forms of naloxone is essential. Naloxone nasal spray costs at least 3 times the price an I.M. injection. More solutions are on the horizon. Expect to see naloxone become more widely available, showing up in vending machines or OTC forms in future years.

In this issue of *Today*, you'll also get an update on OTC options for treating constipation, learn about the health benefits of beets, and get the latest on the controversial new drug for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. You can also read about upcoming biosimilars for adalimumab (Humira–AbbVie Inc.) in 2023 and get recent guidance on non-COVID-19-related vaccine errors. Catch up on your CPE credits with this month's article on the role of pharmacists in increasing access to reproductive health care.

Keep in mind that naloxone alone will not solve the opioid crisis. According to Nabarun Dasgupta, MPH, PhD, an epidemiologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, "We need prevention, we need treatment, we need all sorts of services, but when the overdose death rate is increasing at the pace that it has been, we have to have more emergency antidote available until there are no more overdose deaths." This is a lofty goal, but one that we as pharmacists can help achieve by educating patients and providers, working to decrease the stigma surrounding naloxone, and ensuring easy access to affordable forms of naloxone.

Have a great *Today*!

**Kristin Wiisanen**  
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