

## **Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit**

### **Overdose Prevention Information**

In 2006 in Ontario the number of overdose deaths from opiod drugs was equal to the number of people killed in motor vehicle collisions<sup>[1]</sup>. In addition the number of people who are misusing drugs such as Oxycontin has been a growing concern across the province including in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark.

Effective March 1, 2012, Purdue Pharma stopped the production of the current form of Oxycontin and have introduced a tamper proof form called OxyNeo. The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, in response to growing concerns of misuse of this drug, has removed Oxycontin from the Ontario Drug Benefit Card effective February 29, 2012. OxyNeo will only be available to people through the Exceptional Access Program and the Facilitated Access to Palliative Care Drugs Program.

Agencies, from across the province, who provide services to people who are struggling with Oxycontin misuse have been meeting regularly to plan an appropriate response to deal with the sudden change in the availability of such a widely misused drug. The projected fallout from this sudden change includes people experiencing sudden withdrawal as availability decreases, an increase in the number of people trying to access treatment programs including Methadone Maintenance Treatment and people switching to more potent drugs which can lead to an increase in overdoses.

It is overdosing that has become a major concern in the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark area, as many service providers are already seeing people switch to more potent drugs such as Dilaudid, Hydromorphone, Fentanyl and Cocaine. Overdosing occurs when someone has consumed too much of one drug or a combination of drugs within a period of time. Overdoses can be fatal but many are not, so increases in overdoses result in increased visits to local Emergency Rooms.

There are strategies that can help prevent an overdose from opiod drugs regardless of whether or not your use of these drugs is supervised by a physician.

**Avoid Mixing Drugs** – Avoid mixing opiod drugs including mixing them with **Alcohol and Sleeping Pills (Benzodiazepams)**. Use one drug at a time, or use a lesser amount of drugs if you are going to mix.

**Use Less When Your Tolerance is Lower** –Tolerance happens when your body requires more and more of a drug to achieve the same level of effect. Tolerance builds with prolonged use. Your tolerance of a drug can change with stress, illness and age or when you have had a change in weight. Drug tolerance can decrease rapidly when you have had a break from taking a drug, whether it is an intentional break or unintentional one like a hospital stay. You should use less of the drug when your tolerance is low.

**Inconsistent Drug Quality** – The quality of the drug that you may be purchasing or are getting from a friend can be unpredictable. Start with a small dose to see how your body will react.

**Avoid Using Alone** – There will be no one around to help you if you were to overdose.

If you, a family member or friend is using an opiod drug for personal use or that has been prescribed by a physician, know how to recognize an overdose and more importantly how to respond.

**For more information on overdose signs and symptoms and how to respond to an overdose, please visit [www.healthunit.org](http://www.healthunit.org) or call the Health Action Line 1-800-660-5853.**

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<sup>[1]</sup> Paperny, A.M. "Inquest into Brockville's Fatal Overdoses Lays Bare Tale of Prescription-Drug Abuse, Globe and Mail", July 11, 2011.