

Diversion of prescribed safe supply medications

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Drug fail: The Liberal government's 'safer supply' is fuelling a new opioid crisis

In this special report, columnist Adam Zivo details how drugs handed out for free are being sold on the black market to fund fentanyl addictions

By Adam Zivo
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OPINION

We must end the unwitnessed safe supply of opioids

MARK MALLET

CONTRIBUTED TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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Safe supply: Are prescribed opioids being sold on B.C.'s streets, and if so, is it a problem?

By **Simon Little & Paul Johnson** • Global News
Posted May 11, 2023 9:25 pm • Updated May 12, 2023 10:04 pm

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f Adam Zivo: Astonishing amounts of government-supplied opioids found for sale on Reddit

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Newspaper headlines

- Upsetting, worrisome, focussed away from overdoses
- Ignores the limitations of existing treatment system options and the complexity of the underlying determinants of the crisis
- Guidance document not referenced
- Serve political goals; reinforces stigma
- Used to attack/criticize safer supply (harm reduction in general?)
- Many speak with the media to counter this narrative
- Can't 'shake' this narrative

Definitions of diversion

- The unlawful channeling of regulated pharmaceuticals from legal sources to the illicit marketplace. This includes transferring drugs to people they were not prescribed for. Inciardi et al. *Subst Use Misuse* 2006;41:255-64.
- A practice of giving and helping (Havnes et al., 2013)

Diversion – not unique to safer supply

- Opioid agonists
- Pain medications (outside of safer supply)
- Hormones
- Antibiotics
- Over-the-counter medications (e.g., Tylenol)
- Etc.



Who is
implicated?

Diversion of safe supply medications

Activities

- Trading
- Sharing doses
- Giving
- Theft
- Loss
- Selling medication

Reasons

- Personal obligations
- Community expectations – moral value of reciprocity
- Help others avoid withdrawal
- Coercion
- Income generation
- Income replacement for other criminalized activities (e.g, sex work)
- Safer supply dose ineffective

Contextual factors

- Criminalization
- Discrimination (racism, colonialism etc)
- Neoliberalism – reduced access to services/ supports
- Economic systems and poverty
- Source: <https://www.nss-aps.ca/sites/default/files/resources/ReframingDiversionForHealthCareProviders.pdf>

Varied perspectives

- Diversion increases safety in the community
 - More drugs of known quality and quantity
 - May reduce risk of overdose
 - Offers alternative source of income
- Diversion is a source of risk for the community
 - Exposes some to coercion, violence, theft
 - Perpetuates substance use problems
 - Enables/creates substance use problems
 - Liability for prescribers
 - Threat to the sustainability of safer supply programs

Diversion in context

- Ever increasing dosage and ever-changing content of substances in unregulated supply → increasing tolerance → safer supply medications options limited
- Structural vulnerability increasing → poverty, unhoused
- Poor understanding
 - Magnitude of diversion (e.g., % of doses)
 - Magnitude of negative impacts of diversion (e.g., overdoses)
 - Magnitude of positive impacts (e.g., overdoses averted)

Response options

- Institute supervised dosing
- Increase options for prescribed medications
- Legalize/regulate opioids and other drugs
- Close safer supply programs
- Forced treatment
- Expand OAT
- Do nothing
- More advocacy
- Study more? But what?
- Etc?



Thank you