



International Overdose Awareness Day

A message from Tess Kroeker, RPN Council President

On August 31 we observe International Overdose Awareness Day. What started in Melbourne, Australia in 2001 has become a worldwide movement to raise awareness of overdose and help reduce the stigma of drug-related deaths. It also affords us an opportunity to remember those lost to overdose. Each person lost to overdose has left behind family, friends and colleagues who loved and grieve them. Those who have died are members of our community and we all mourn their deaths. Overdose does not discriminate, and it is not a problem of the 'inner city'. It impacts us all.

In July of 2020 paramedics attended approximately 2,700 overdose calls (previous averages have been in the range of around 2,000 a month). Additionally, May-July 2020 have marked the deadliest months of this opioid crisis since December of 2016 with 171 lives lost in May, 175 in June and an additional 175 in July in British Columbia. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to this alarming rise because of an increasingly toxic drug supply and a higher incidence of people using drugs at home due to physical distancing guidelines, to name two key factors. While efforts are being made to reduce this number of deaths, the fact remains that lives are being lost to a crisis that is only worsening as we grapple with COVID-19.

At a time of public health crisis, stigma can literally kill. If people who use substances are not comfortable seeking medical attention, feel dismissed by society in general and have internalized messages that their lives are not as valued as others, they are far less likely to interact with valuable and potentially life-saving services. Death by overdose is the worst-case scenario.

Nursing's reputation as the world's most trusted profession is based on its long history of working with the most vulnerable populations, often in times of crisis and we have a responsibility to protect and advocate for at risk populations, such as those who use substances. As an organization, NNPBC supports harm reduction strategies including decriminalization for personal use and safe-supply. As a nursing community please know we mourn with those of you have lost loved ones to overdose.

On this International Overdose Day, let's take the opportunity to advocate for meaningful change so that we can end the stigma that perpetuates substance use and overdose.



Tess Kroeker,

RPN Council President/Board Member