

Accountability and Transparency in Opioid Access and Use in the Context of COVID-19

A Multi-Stakeholder Webinar Series

Session 1: Accountability, Transparency, Criminality, and Policy: A Case Study of Illicit Online Opioid Diversion

October 22, 2020, 12:00-1:00pm

Dr. Tim Mackey

Associate Professor and Director of Healthcare Research and Policy at the University of California San Diego

Bio: Tim K. Mackey, MAS, PhD, is a current fellow at the University of Toronto World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Governance, Accountability, and Transparency in the Pharmaceutical Sector. He is also an Associate Professor at UC San Diego, the Director of Healthcare Research and Policy at UC San Diego - Extension, and the Director of the Global Health Policy and Data Institute. Outside of academic work, he is also the CEO and co-founder of the National Institutes of Health funded technology startup S-3 Research LLC. His work on online opioid diversion and COVID19 fraudulent products has been covered by Vox/Recode, the Wall Street Journal, Politico PRO, CNN and others.

Presentation Summary: Dr. Tim Mackey will discuss research, public policy, and technology aspects of the opioid epidemic as it relates to online drug diversion. We will first begin with a description of the problem of illicit online drug sales that have rapidly proliferated across multiple parts of the Internet, including websites, social media platforms, the dark web, and other online venues. We will then discuss public policy efforts, including in the US and Canada that have attempted to address this form of cyber drug crime. Finally, we will end with a discussion of translation of technology innovation into real-world solutions to address the problem, including its ability to combat fraudulent COVID-19 products.

Session 2: Opioid Practices and Policies: Benefits, Harms, and Opportunities

November 5, 2020, 12:00pm-1:00pm

Dr. Nanky Rai

Primary Care Physician, Parkdale-Queen West Community Health Centre

Bio: Dr. Nanky Rai is trained in public health and works as a family physician at the Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre. She has been active in grassroots movements for health justice for the past 10 years and is a member of the Toronto Overdose Prevention Society which set up unsanctioned Overdose Prevention Sites in Moss Park and Parkdale as a response to the devastating overdose crisis. Her academic work focuses on conducting historical analyses of structural violence embedded within healthcare institutions and clinical practice as well as grassroots/community responses to build health equity. Her clinical practice focuses on caring for people who use drugs, those living with HIV and Hepatitis C, as well as LGBTQ2SIA+ and migrant health. She works closely with people with lived expertise of drug use to develop innovative harm reduction programs aimed at reducing overdose deaths and harms associated with criminalization. In addition to being the recipient of University of Toronto's 2017 Robert Sheppard Award for Health Equity and Social Justice, she is also the recipient of St. Michael's Hospital's Department of Family and Community Medicine Quality Improvement Impact Award. She also received the College of Family Physicians of Canada Award of Excellence in 2018.

Presentation Summary: Canada continues to be in a devastating opioid overdose crisis where 4 Ontarians die every day from overdose. While opioid agonist treatment provides protection from overdose-related mortality, retention remains a major issue. Injectable opioid agonist treatment options are unavailable, unaffordable and difficult to scale up in all parts of the country. In response to advocacy carried out by communities of people who use drugs, health care practitioners are developing novel, low-threshold harm reduction based Safer Opioid Supply (SOS) programs that aim to provide a daily-dispensed pharmaceutical opioid alternative to those who are at immediate risk of overdose from using the illicit opioid supply. The SOS programs aim to reduce overdose deaths and overall rates of overdose, reduce rates of criminalization, and repair relationships with the health care system with the goal of improving access back to anti-oppressive primary health care. While this intervention grounded in healthcare aims to build decriminalization from the ground up, we have a responsibility to continue pushing for urgent policy shifts towards decriminalization to stop the ongoing crisis of opioid related overdose deaths.

Dr. Dan Werb

Research Scientist, Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute

Bio: Dan Werb, PhD, is the Director of the Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. He is also an assistant professor at the Institute for Health Policy, Management & Evaluation at the University of Toronto, and in the Division of Infectious Diseases & Global Public Health at the University of California, San Diego.

Presentation Summary: The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the fragility of Canada's response to the opioid overdose epidemic. It has also demonstrated that, as the opioid overdose mortality rate increases in a number of settings across Canada, that we are now experience a syndemic of overdose mortality and a novel respiratory disease. This presentation will describe

trends in overdose prior to and post-COVID, and will discuss how the pandemic has affected—and forced innovation—in the suite of services that are known to reduce the risk of overdose death.

Milica Pavlovic

JD Candidate 2021, University of Toronto Faculty of Law

Bio: Prior to law school, Milica worked in various capacities in the public health sector in BC, including as a case manager for an HIV and Hepatitis C program, and as a researcher for a Vancouver-based population and public health consulting firm. Upon BC's declaration of the opioid crisis as a public health emergency, Milica worked closely with directly affected highly marginalized populations and various municipal and provincial stakeholders in contributing to the public health response. Milica continues to bridge these interests through her legal studies, where she focuses on public health related legal matters, including pharmaceutical regulation and opioid litigation.

Presentation Summary: This presentation will provide a brief overview of the so-called first and second wave of opioid litigation in the US and Canada, with a particular emphasis on the (current) second wave characterized predominately by government plaintiffs bringing claims against opioid manufacturers and distributors for their role in the opioid crisis. In particular, the presentation will focus on the BC government's national opioid class action, initiated on August 2018, drawing comparisons to the US' (more advanced) parallel opioid litigation. Where appropriate, comparisons will also be drawn to lessons learned from both countries' tobacco litigation. The presentation will situate these proceedings in the context of public health implications, considering to what extent such litigation could create systemic change and provide tangible benefits to affected individuals.

Dr. Brandon Maser

Paediatrics Resident, Hospital for Sick Children

Bio: I am a paediatric resident physician at The Hospital for Sick Children and is a trainee in the University of Toronto's Clinician Investigator Program. He is in the third year of his PhD in Health Policy and a Collaborative Specialization in Global Health through Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation. My research interests are focused on palliative care, global child health, health policy and politics, and access to medicines. My thesis research aims to better understand how sociopolitical factors influence policy reforms for improving access to opioid medicines in low-income countries, using a case study of opioid policy reforms in Uganda.

Presentation Summary: This presentation will discuss recent trends in global opioid consumption, providing an overview of the global burden of opioid-related harms and highlighting differences between the factors that have contributed to a rising prevalence of opioid misuse in North America and other countries (particularly low- and middle-income

countries). We will then discuss how, alongside the issue of opioid misuse, access to essential opioid medicines remains a persistent and significant global problem. With an overview of these two issues, we will then explore how these two outcomes - opioid misuse and opioid inaccessibility - can be driven by similar, and sometimes competing, policy and system-level factors. Finally, we will conclude by discussing some ideas and remaining questions for how to move forward within a unified global agenda for simultaneously improving opioid medicine access while ensuring appropriate use.

Session 3: Ensuring Access While Preventing, Addressing, and Reducing Harm

November 20, 2020, 12:00pm-1:00pm

Dr. Tara Gomes

Epidemiologist, Ontario Drug Policy Research Network, Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute

Bio: Tara Gomes is an epidemiologist, a Principal Investigator of the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network and a Scientist at St. Michael's Hospital and ICES. She is also an assistant professor at the University of Toronto and holds a Canada Research Chair in Drug Policy Research and Evaluation. Her research program focuses on pharmacoepidemiology, drug safety and drug policy research, with a specific interest in developing evidence to inform policies related to the safety of opioid use across Canada.

Presentation Summary: The COVID-19 pandemic struck in the midst of an ongoing epidemic of opioid-related death that had already claimed close to 4,000 Canadian lives during 2019. Because of pre-existing structural vulnerabilities and a heavy reliance on face-to-face encounters with the healthcare system, changes to healthcare delivery and physical distancing during a pandemic imparts a high risk to people living with opioid use disorder (OUD). In light of these concerns, providing appropriate access to supports and treatment for people with OUD has emerged as a high priority at both the national and provincial level. In March 2020, new COVID-19 specific guidance for OAT was released in Ontario to address the need for physical distancing and quarantine, while maintaining uninterrupted access to treatment. A key component of this guidance was the provision of take-home doses of OAT to people who might not have previously been considered eligible for this format of treatment delivery. Given this rapid transformation of the system through which people with OUD are now accessing treatment, there is an urgent need to evaluate the uptake and impact of this new guidance in Ontario. This presentation will describe changes in the landscape of opioid use and related harm during the COVID-19 pandemic and will report early findings of an evaluation of the impacts of changing OAT provision across Ontario.

Dr. Gillian Kolla

Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, University of Victoria

Bio: Gillian Kolla is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, University of Victoria. She conducts community-based qualitative and ethnographic research to explore the impacts of harm reduction interventions, and examine how to make health and social services more accessible to people who use drugs. Gillian is also a member of the coordinating committee for the Toronto Overdose Prevention Society, which opened and ran Ontario's first overdose prevention site in Moss Park as a volunteer initiative in 2017-2018 as part of a community-led response to overdose deaths.

Presentation Summary: This presentation will examine the North American overdose crisis as a crisis of a poisoned street drug supply, primarily due to the contamination of heroin with illicitly produced fentanyl and fentanyl analogues. It will explore the harm reduction interventions that have been implemented with some success in addressing this crisis, and will explore Safer Opioid Supply programs as a novel intervention to divert people using street-acquired fentanyl(s) and at high risk of overdose death onto a pharmaceutical opioid supply. The challenges associated with harm reduction service delivery and access during the COVID-19 pandemic will also be explored.

Lesley Graham

Graduate Student & Pharmacist, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Bio: Lesley Graham, RPh, BScPharm(Hons), MSc, trained as a pharmacist in the UK where she worked for several years in the areas of hospital formulary management, academic detailing in primary care and latterly as an interface pharmacist across both sectors. During this time she undertook a MSc in health policy to try to understand decision making around drug funding. Her main interest is in rational prescribing and she developed an interest in opioid prescribing after experiencing opioid prescribing practices as a pharmacist in Ontario. She is currently a graduate student and is involved in a joint project with the Centre of Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and the Institute of Safe Medications Canada (ISMP) to help community pharmacists dispense appropriate quantities of opioids for acute pain.

Presentation Summary: While treatment and harm reduction approaches for opioid use disorder are critical, a focus on prevention is also important. Opioids play an important role in the management of acute pain, however, prescribing excessive opioid quantities increases the risk of long-term opioid use, and left-over opioids in the home are associated with overdose and other risks. We have an ongoing study that takes provincial recommendations on opioid prescribing and translates them into activities that community pharmacists can undertake to promote the rational use of opioids in acute pain - with a focus on assessing and recommending appropriate opioid quantities and daily doses. The intervention has been launched in 5 regions in Ontario as part of randomized, controlled study that is using surveys and dispensed opioid quantities to evaluate the impact.