It is no secret [1] that addiction to narcotics (heroin, oxycodone, hydrocodone) has become a growing problem in the US. Of these drugs, heroin is by far the most potent and thus has the highest potential for a fatal overdose especially since no user can ever know exactly how much heroin (and other drugs) are in a particular batch, or with what it has been adulterated.

There is a very effective drug called Narcan (naloxone) invented sixty years ago that rapidly reverses the potentially fatal effects of an opiate overdose typically suppressed breathing if given in time. But it is generally given in emergency rooms, and this increases the time until treatment almost guaranteeing otherwise-preventable deaths.

The good news [2] is that a Virginia-based company called kaleo pharma has come up with a very clever method of reducing the time until treatment. Their auto-injection pen, called Evzio will make naloxone much more available outside the hospital, and easier to use. Based on the concept of the epipen, Evzio delivers an appropriate dose of naloxone and it can’t be easier. The pen is small enough to be carried in your pocket, and actually gives you verbal instructions once it is activated.

Dr. Eric Edwards, Chief Medical Officer of the company says, Kaléo was founded on the idea that patients are true experts on how their conditions impact their lives, and [Evzio] was developed with patient and caregiver input throughout to make sure it would be easy to use in stressful opioid emergencies with limited training |[i]mmediate availability of [Evzio] for family members and caregivers to administer during a suspected opioid overdose has the potential to save many lives.

And the FDA wholeheartedly agreed. The device was given fast-track status which is given for drugs that appear to provide safe and effective therapy when no satisfactory alternative therapy exists.

Among other things, the device was not required to go through the normal review of an expert advisory panel, and was reviewed and approved in an astounding fifteen weeks.

ACSHs Dr. Josh Bloom says, this is a great advance, but it is not a panacea. Different narcotics remain in the blood for very different time periods. While heroin has a short half-life (the time it
takes for fifty percent of the drug to be gone), other opiates last much longer. So, one dose of
Evzio might work for awhile, but once it wears off there still may be fatal levels of narcotic present.
This does not replace a trip to the hospital. It merely gets you there alive.

In the ridiculous news department, naloxone is one of the many drugs that are in short supply in
hospitals. You can read Dr. Bloom’s New York Post op-ed Running out of Common Drugs here [3].
The op-ed is from 2011, yet we still have massive shortages of common lifesaving drugs three
years later. Pathetic.

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