Diversion of prescribed safe supply medications

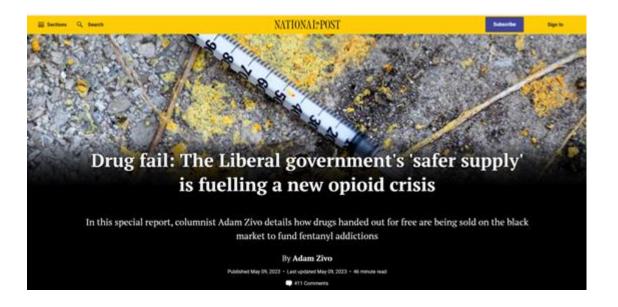
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HEALTH

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

We must end the unwitnessed safe supply of opioids

MARK MALLET

OPINION

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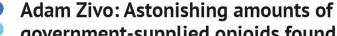
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Newspaper headlines

- 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.nssaps.ca/sites/default/files/res ources/ReframingDiversionF orHealthCareProviders.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?

