

Suicide: Overdose Deaths of Despair

Mark S. Gold, MD

ASAM's Annual Lifetime Achievement John P. McGovern Award and Prize Winner

Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry

Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, MO

17th University of Florida Distinguished Alumni Professor

Gainesville, FL



Mark S. Gold, MD

Disclosures



- ***Consultant:*** ADAPT Pharma (Dublin, Ireland)

Learning Objective 1

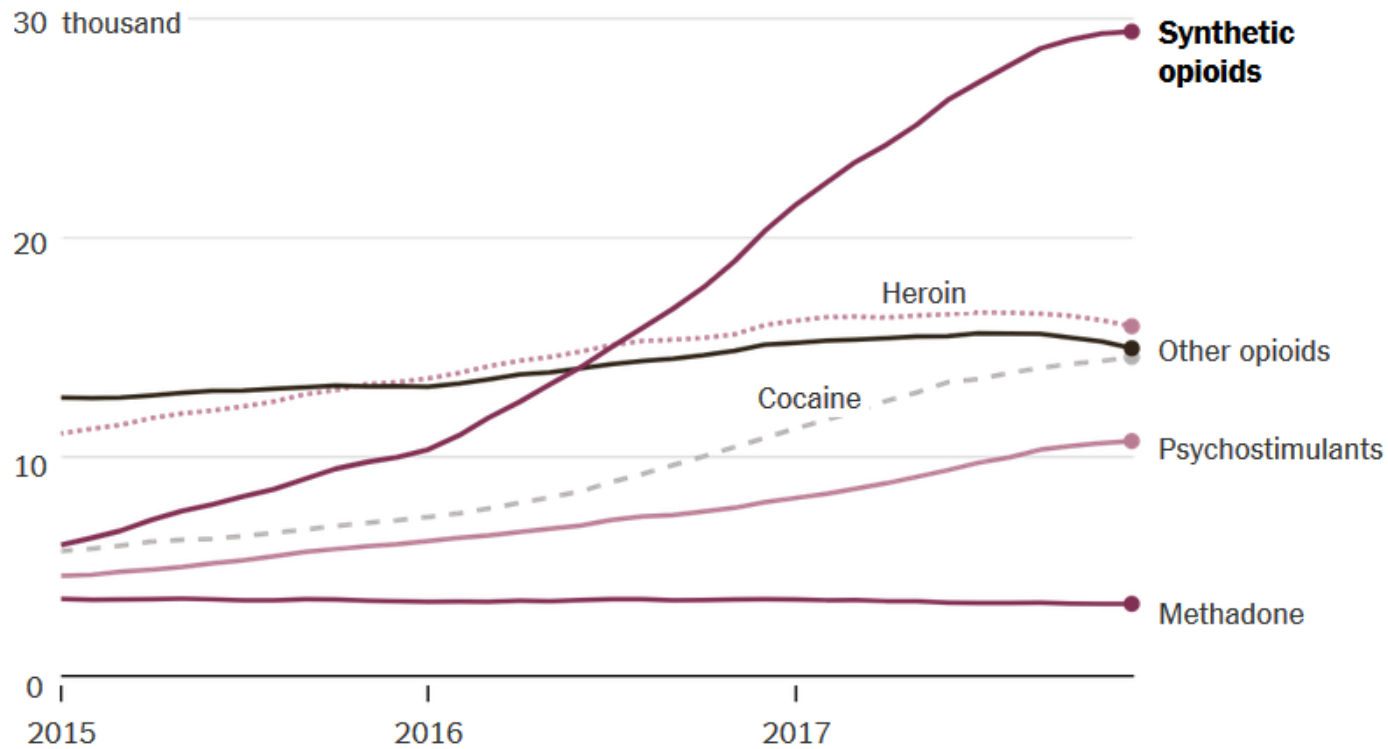
Recognize the relationship between opioid misuse and suicide risk.



Synthetic Opioids are Driving Up the Overdose Rate

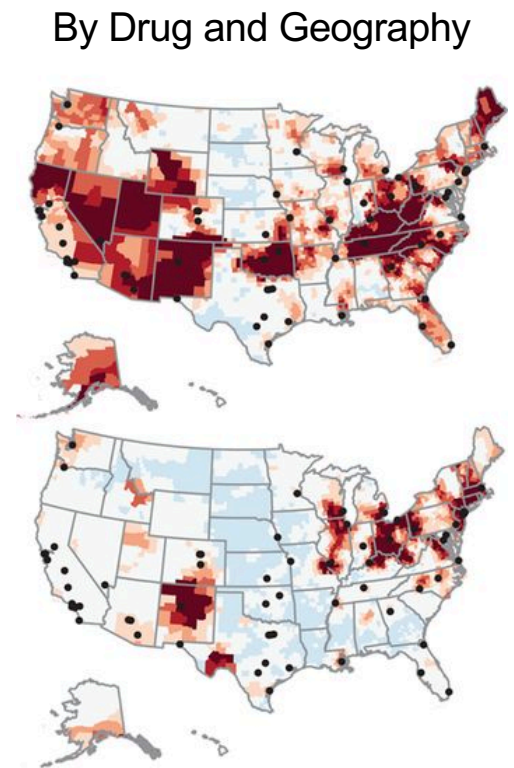
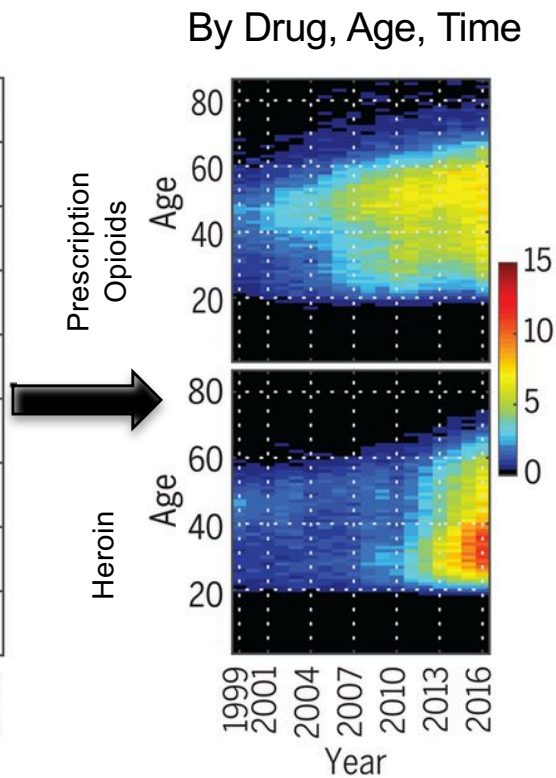
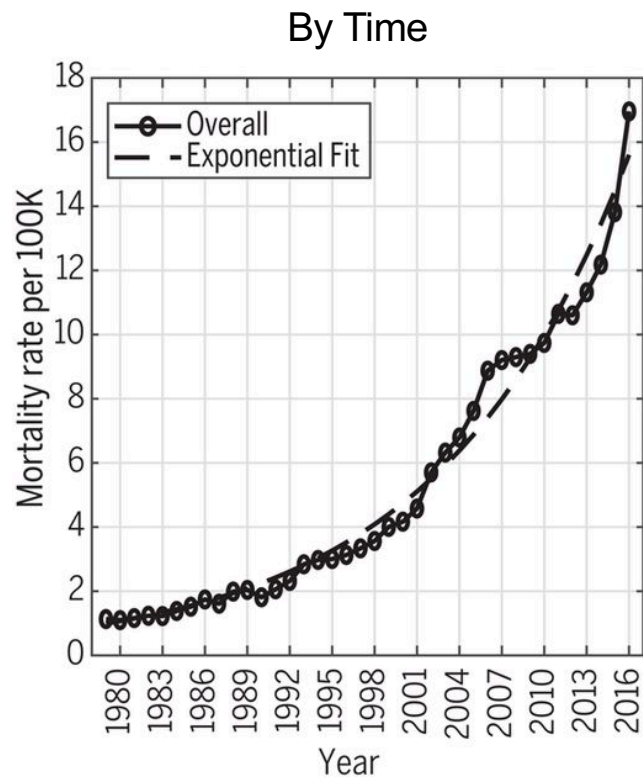


Overdose Deaths in Thousands in Preceding 12 Months



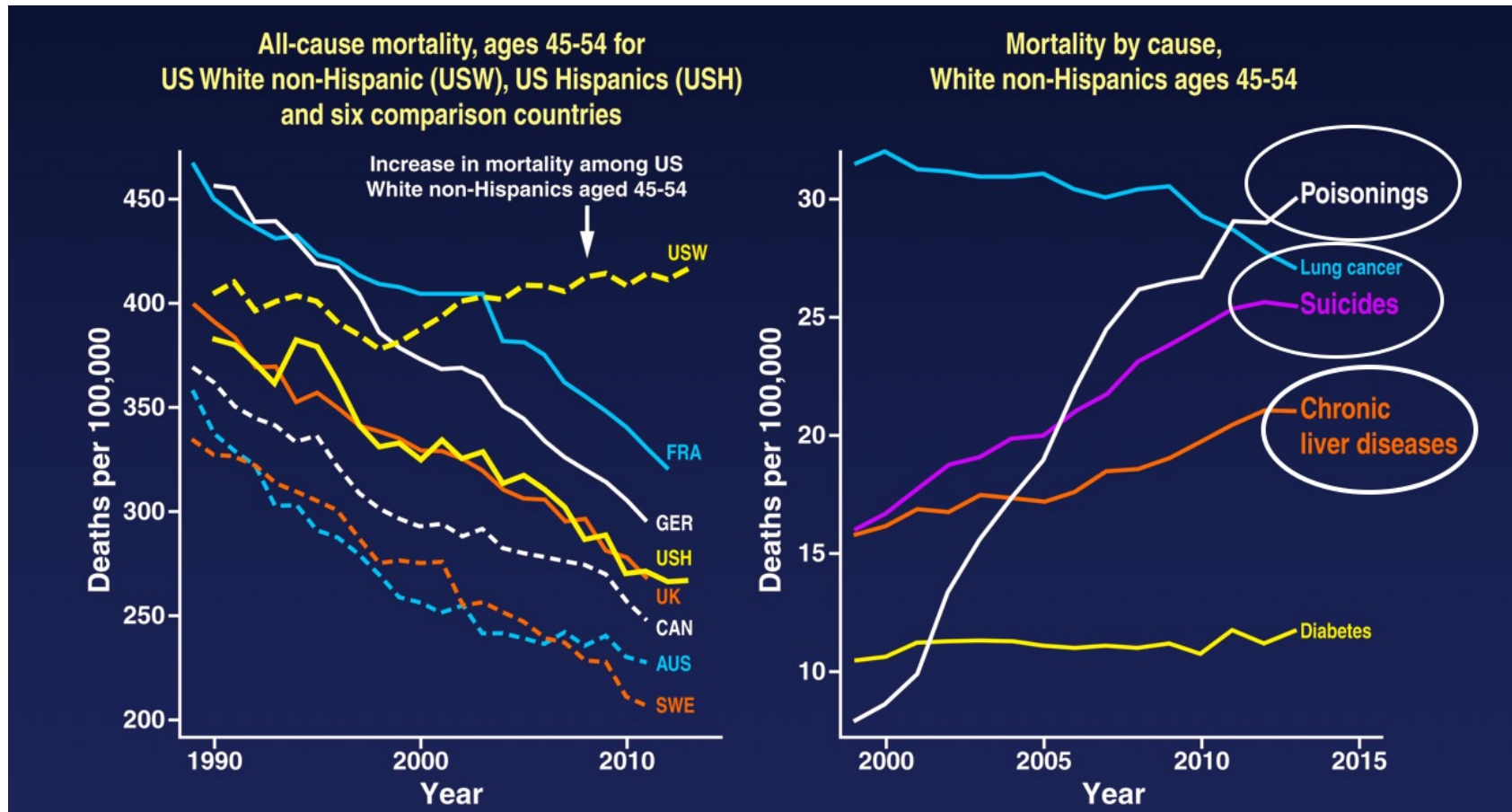
Sanger-Katz M. *New York Times*. Published August 15, 2018. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/15/upshot/opioids-overdose-deaths-rising-fentanyl.html>. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm#source>. Accessed February 6, 2020.

Exponential Growth in Overdose Deaths: Overdose Mortality Rate



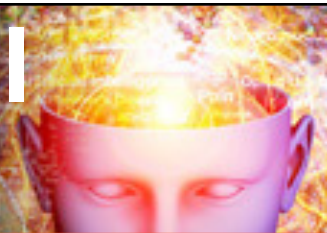
Jalal H, et al. *Science*. 2018;361(6408). pii: eaau1184. doi: 10.1126/science.aau1184.

”Deaths of Despair”



Case A, Deaton A. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2015;112(49):15078-15083.

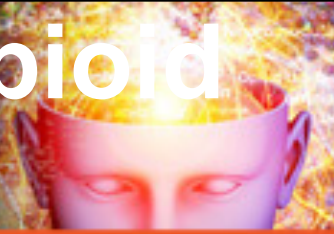
Overdose Deaths: Accidental Until Proven Otherwise



- Classification overdose as accidental may not tell the whole story and may be, in fact be misdiagnosed suicide attempts
- More than 50% of patients with opioid use disorder have histories of major depressive disorder which, when untreated, may further drive suicidal thoughts and behaviors

1. Srivastava, BA, Gold, MS. *Clinical Psychiatry News*. Available at: <https://www.mdedge.com/psychiatry/article/145653/addiction-medicine/missed-opportunities-opioid-overdoses-and-suicide>. Accessed January 20, 2020. 2. Volkow N. Published April 20, 2017. Available at <https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/noras-blog/2017/04/opioid-use-disorders-suicide-hidden-tragedy-guest-blog>. Accessed February 6, 2020.

Suicide: A Silent Contributor to Opioid Overdose Deaths



- Addressing the trajectory of opioid overdoses requires a better understanding between intentional (suicide) and unintentional (accidental) deaths
- Yet, most strategies to address overdose do not include screening for suicide or the need to tailor interventions for suicidal persons
- Classifying these deaths as “undetermined” if no documented history of depression hinders deployment of prevention services

Suicide risk in OUD is **6x** the general US pop even after controlling for suicide risk factors such as coexisting psychiatric diagnoses, **OUD** more than **doubled** suicide risk among women and increased risk by **30%** in men

250,000+ ED visits for
opioid overdose
26.5% intentional
20.0% undetermined

True proportion of
suicides among
opioid overdoses
likely **20%-30%**, but
could be even higher

Frequency of Prescription Opioid Misuse Associated with Suicidal Ideation

- Analysis of 41,053 participants of the National Survey of Drug Use and Health grouped into 4 categories based on past year frequency of prescription opioid misuse
 - None
 - Less than monthly (1-11 times)
 - Monthly to weekly (12-51 times)
 - Weekly or more (52+ times)
- Frequency of opioid misuse was significantly associated with suicidal ideation ($p < 0.05$ for each frequency category)
- Weekly or more group also associated with suicide planning and attempts ($p < 0.05$)
- Analysis was adjusted for demographics, overall health rating, depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders

Suicidal Motivation Prior to Overdose Along a Continuum of Severity is Common

120 survivors of overdose (92% heroin/fentanyl)

- 41.5% stated that they did not want to die
- 58.5% reported at least some desire to die before their most recent overdose
- 36% reported strong desire to die
- 21% reported “I definitely wanted to die”
- Perceptions of overdose risk were variable
 - 30.2% reported no likelihood of overdose
 - 13.2% reported high likelihood of overdose

Suicidal Motivation Prior to Overdose Along a Continuum of Severity is Common

120 survivors of overdose (99% heroin/fentanyl)

- 41.5% reported suicidal thoughts before (10)
- 58.5% reported suicidal thoughts before their overdose (10)
- 36% reported suicidal thoughts before (10)
- 21% reported suicidal thoughts before (10)
- Percentage of survivors reporting suicidal thoughts before their overdose (10)
 - 30.2% reported suicidal thoughts before (10)
 - 13.2% reported high likelihood of overdose (10/10)

Dr. Hilary Connery and her Harvard University coauthors write that, “*the classification of a drug overdose as either ‘unintentional’ or ‘intentional’ may not always reflect accurately upon either the behavioral episode itself or the treatment interventions most appropriate for preventing drug-related mortality.*”



Edward J. Khantzian, M.D. vs Mark Gold, M.D.



The Self-Medication Hypothesis

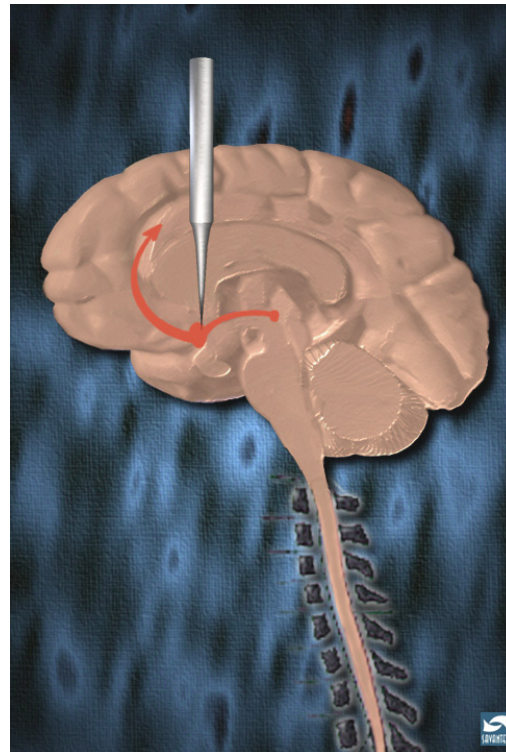
The SMH maintains that suffering (not pleasure seeking) is at the heart of addictive disorders, such that:

1 Addictive drugs have appeal because during the short term they relieve painful feelings and psychological distress.

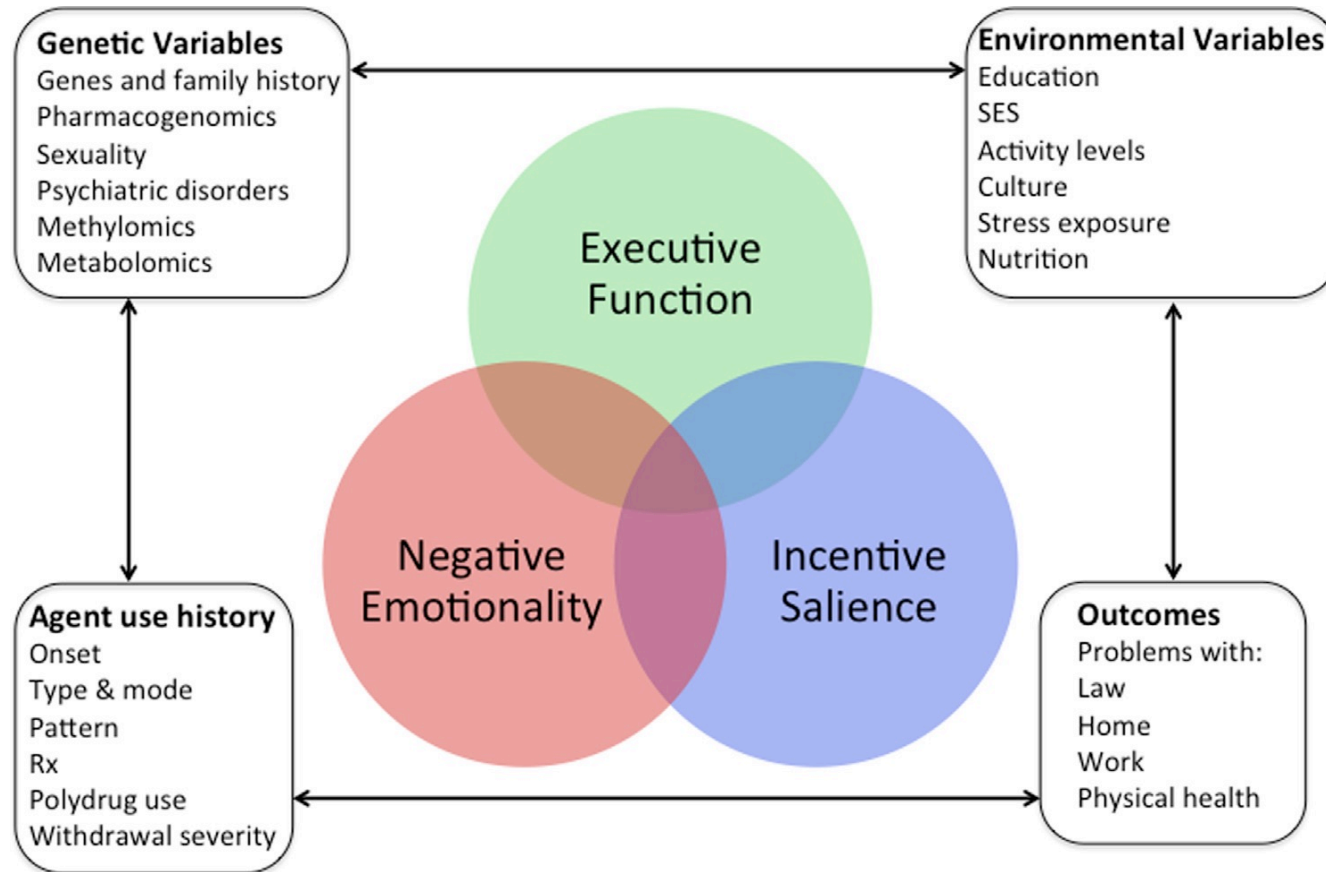
2 There is a considerable degree of preference in a person's drug of choice, but it isn't as though a person "chooses" a drug; rather while experimenting with various drugs, he or she discovers that the effect of a particular drug is experienced as welcome because it changes or relieves feeling states that are especially painful or unwanted for reasons special to that person.



Brain Reward Threshold Changes with Drug Use—Does it Change Back?



Addictions Neuroclinical Assessment: A Neuroscience-Based Framework for Addictive Disorders



Kwako LE, et al. *Biol Psychiatry*. 2016;80(3):179-189.

Call to Action



- Screen for suicide risk in patients with chronic pain and other conditions where opioid are prescribed and in substance use
- Standardize screening for suicide risk and treatment referral among emergency patients who have overdosed
- Reduce the double stigma associated with suicide and drug addiction that might make patients more willing to seek treatment