

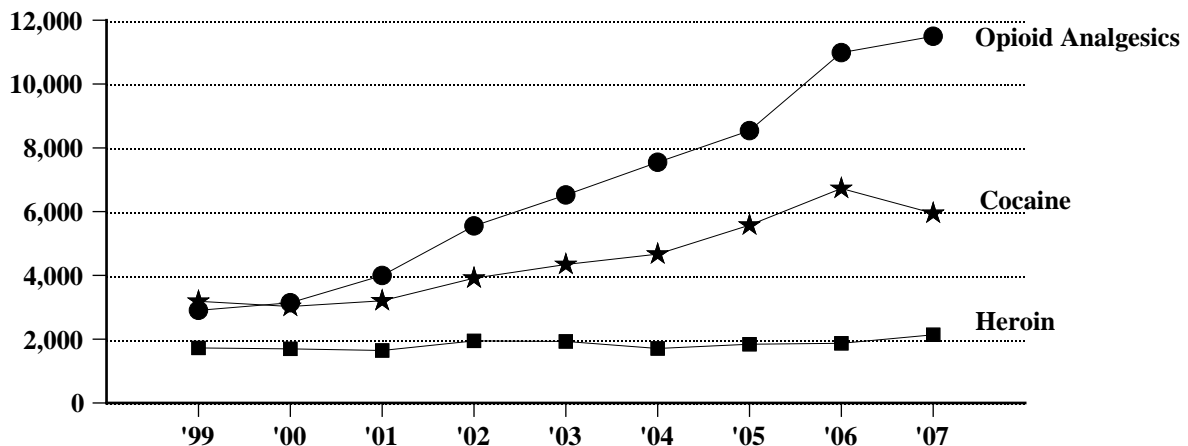
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Number of Unintentional Opioid Analgesic Overdose Deaths Increases Fourfold Since 1999; Responsible for More Than Cocaine and Heroin Combined

The number of opioid analgesic deaths in the United States has nearly quadrupled over the past decade, according to data from the CDC's National Vital Statistics System. There were 2,901 unintentional drug deaths involving opioid analgesics¹ in 1999, compared to 11,499 in 2007 (the most recent year for which data are available). There were nearly twice as many deaths in 2007 involving opioid analgesics than deaths involving cocaine, and more than five times as many than those involving heroin. In fact, opioid analgesics have been responsible for more unintentional drug overdose deaths in the United States than cocaine and heroin combined since 2003. Unintentional drug overdoses deaths are the second leading cause of all unintentional deaths in the U.S., after motor vehicle-related deaths (see *CESAR FAX*, Volume 20, Issue 19).

Number of U.S. Unintentional Drug Overdose Deaths by Top Three Causes, 1999-2007



¹Opioid analgesics are categorized as methadone (ICD-10 code T40.3), other opioids (T40.2), and other synthetic narcotics (T40.4).

SOURCES: Adapted by CESAR from Paulozzi, L.J., Weisler, R.H., and Patkar, A.A., "A National Epidemic of Unintentional Prescription Opioid Overdose Deaths: How Physicians Can Help Control It," *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, published online ahead of print, April 19, 2011; and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, personal communication, 5/20/2011.