

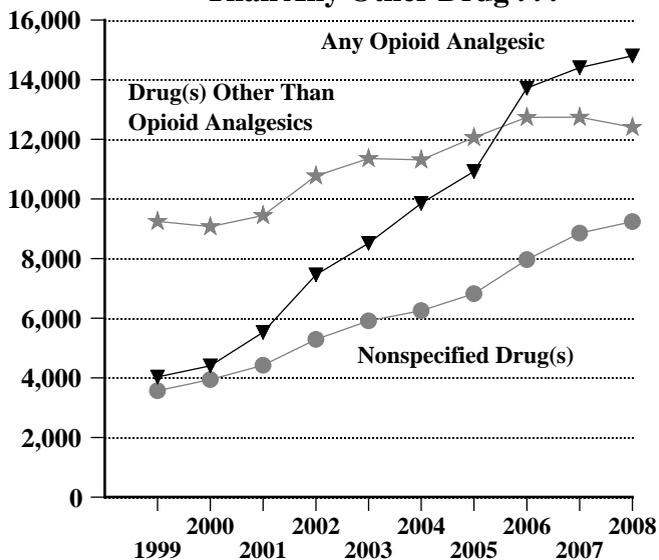
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

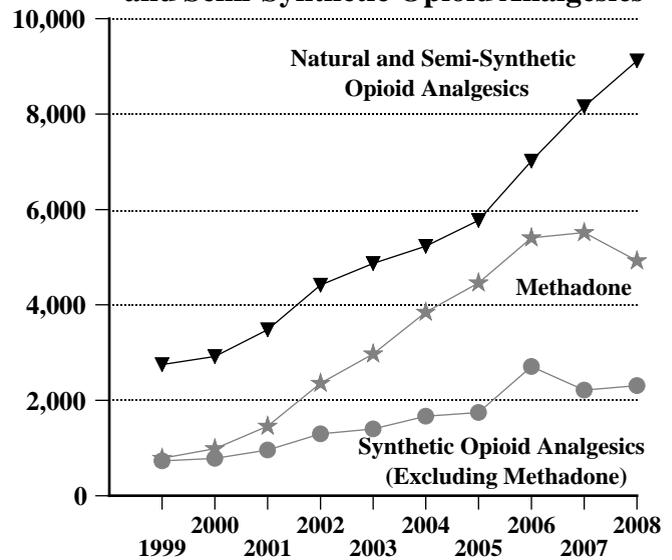
Opioid Analgesics Involved in More Drug Poisoning Deaths Than Any Other Drug

Drug poisoning deaths are the second leading cause of injury deaths in the U.S. (see *CESAR FAX*, Volume 21, Issue 3). Of the 36,450 drug poisoning deaths in the U.S. in 2008, slightly more than 40%—14,800—involved opioid analgesics, according to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In contrast, only one-third of drug poisoning deaths involved specified drugs other than opioid analgesics, including cocaine (about 5,100 deaths) and heroin (about 3,000 deaths). The majority of opioid analgesic drug poisoning deaths involved natural and semi-synthetic opioid analgesics, such as morphine, hydrocodone, and oxycodone. In addition, drug poisoning deaths involving these drugs have been increasing steadily over the last decade, reaching a record high of 9,119 deaths in 2008. Deaths from synthetic opioid analgesics, such as methadone and fentanyl, have declined in recent years.

Opioid Analgesics Are Now Involved in More Drug Poisoning Deaths Than Any Other Drug . . .



and the Majority of Opioid Analgesic Drug Poisoning Deaths Involve Natural and Semi-Synthetic Opioid Analgesics*



*Opioid analgesic categories are not mutually exclusive. Deaths involving more than one opioid analgesic category shown in this figure are counted multiple times. The substances tested for and circumstances in which the tests are performed at autopsy vary by jurisdiction. It is also likely that tests for some substances, such as buprenorphine, are not performed.

NOTES: Drug poisoning deaths include unintentional (accidental), intentional (suicide and homicide), and undetermined intent poisoning deaths caused by exposure to narcotics, hallucinogens, antiepileptics, sedative-hypnotics, antiparkinsonisms, psychotropics, nonopioid analgesics, antipyretics, antirheumatics, other drugs acting on the autonomic nervous system, and other and unspecified drugs, medicaments, and biological substances (ICD-10 codes X40-X44, X60-X64, X86, and Y10-Y14). Nonspecified drugs are those in which the type of drugs involved was not specified on the death certificate.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC), *Drug Poisoning Deaths in the United States, 1980-2008*, 2011 (available online at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db81.pdf>).