

Lead author of Canada's national guideline for treating opioid addiction to speak at the 2018 NDARC Symposium

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Professor Julie Bruneau, lead author of a recently published national Canadian guideline for treating opioid use disorders will speak at the NDARC Annual Research Symposium on Monday, 8 October 2018.

According to Professor Bruneau, the guideline, published in [*CMAJ \(Canadian Medical Association Journal\)*](#) earlier this year, was developed in response to an urgent need for evidence-based treatment of opioid use to improve quality care, help reduce accidental overdoses and death, and prevent drug related harms including hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection.

In 2017, close to 4000 opioid-related deaths are estimated to have occurred in Canada, with large variability between regions.

While HIV incidence has significantly declined among people who inject drugs (PWID), HCV remains extremely high.

“In Montreal, our group highlighted the complex interplay between HCV and opioid epidemics, demonstrated by the three-fold increase in risk of HCV acquisition for people who inject prescription opioids (PO), relative to those who do not,” said Professor Bruneau.

“There is an urgent need for health systems to look at the historical gaps in care and invest in providing timely and evidence-based treatment.

"By encouraging physicians to work alongside their patients to identify the safest, most effective approach first, these new guidelines ensure the best science and evidence are integrated into care."

The guideline was developed by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse (CRISM).

The review panel included 43 health care practitioners and people with opioid use disorder experience to represent patient values and preferences in developing recommendations.

The guideline recognises that many individuals benefit from the ability to move between treatments and recommends using a stepped and integrated care approach, where treatment intensity is continually adjusted to accommodate individual patient needs and circumstances over time.

Opioid agonist treatment with buprenorphine-naloxone is recommended as first-line treatment because of its safety record, including:

- Low risk of overdose and lower risk of breathing suppression
- Ease of use (especially in rural and remote areas where daily witnessed ingestion is not practical)
- Dosing flexibility
- Milder withdrawal symptoms if stopping treatment

Professor Bruneau is the scientific director of the Quebec-Atlantic node of CRISM, a network conducting a number of trials and implementation science projects to address the opioid crisis and develop better care for people who use drugs in Canada.

NDARC's Director, Professor Michael Farrell said he was delighted to welcome Professor Bruneau to the Symposium.

“We are closely monitoring the challenges of the North American opioid crisis and look forward to hearing about some of the Canadian responses in more depth,” said Professor Farrell.

“Thankfully, Australia has not yet reached the level of opioid use and harms that North America has experienced, however, we recognise the need for vigilance and readiness to respond.”

Professor Bruneau will present, *Enhancing quality health care for people who use drugs* at the 2018 NDARC Annual Symposium on Monday, 8 October 2018. [Register now](#).

More information about the Symposium, including the full event program is available on the [NDARC website](#).

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