Opioid overdose deaths: Rise due to non-prescription sources

- VA researchers cross-checked National Death Index data with VHA records between 2010–2016 to trace causes of opioid overdose deaths.

- Prescription opioid receipt within 3 months before death declined from 54% in 2010 to 26% in 2016.

- Synthetic opioid (including fentanyl, usually from illicit sources) and heroin overdose rates increased substantially during this time.

Conclusions: “Opioid overdose rates among [VHA] Veterans increased because of increases in heroin and synthetic opioid overdose rates. ... By 2016, only a minority received an opioid analgesic from VHA within 3 months of overdose. Future prevention efforts should extend beyond patients actively receiving opioid prescriptions.”