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# Promoting Awareness of the Opioid Epidemic in Rural Vermont

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# Promoting Awareness of the Opioid Epidemic in Rural Vermont

Completed by Kathleen Olson MS-III with the assistance of Dr. George Fjeld at Brandon Medical Center for the Family Medicine rotation in December 2016-January 2017.

# Problem Identification:

Vermont is in the middle of an opioid epidemic. In 2015, 2.9% of Vermonters misused a pain reliever and 1.4% of the population were treated for opioid dependence (1,2). The amount of people misusing prescription pain medication has decreased while heroin has remained stable (3). However, this is still a major problem in Vermont as a large number of Vermonters continue to misuse pain medications, the number of ER visits for heroin use has increased, and both heroin and fentanyl related fatalities have increased (4,5).

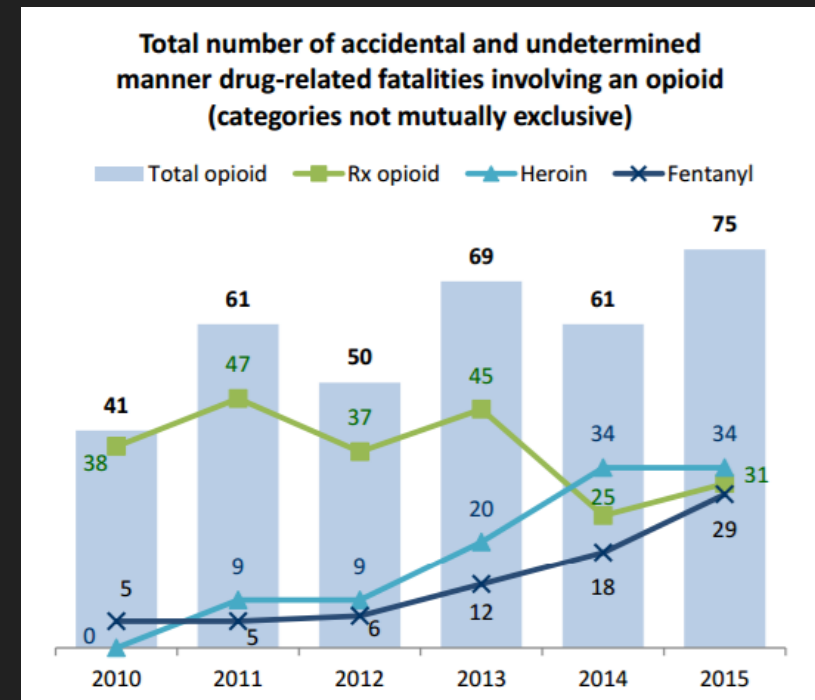
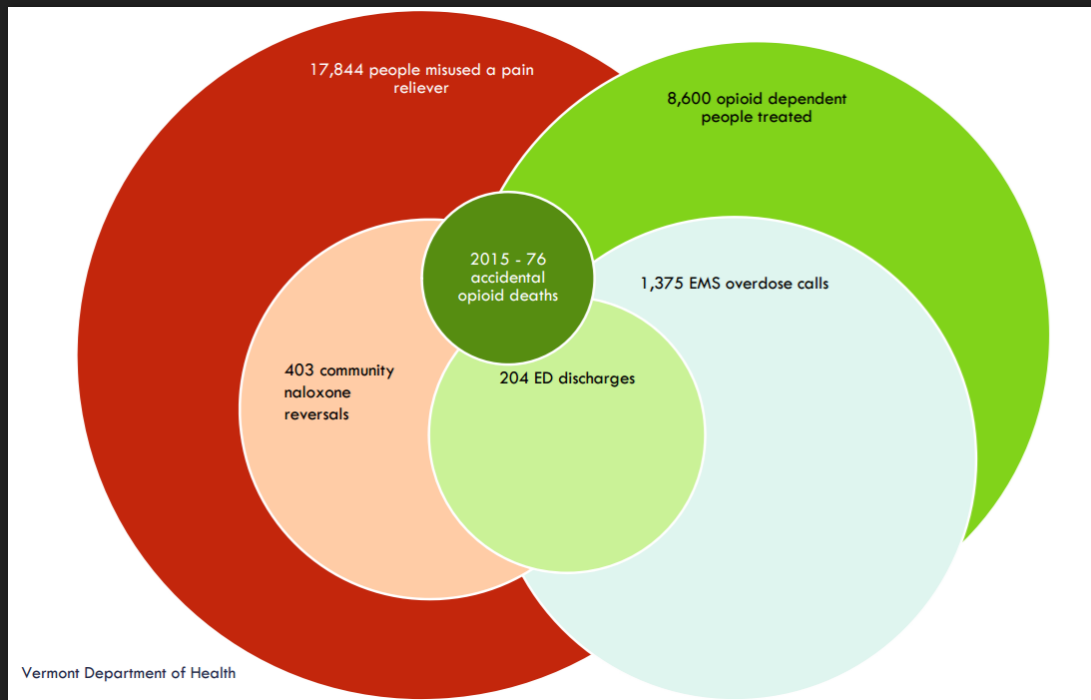
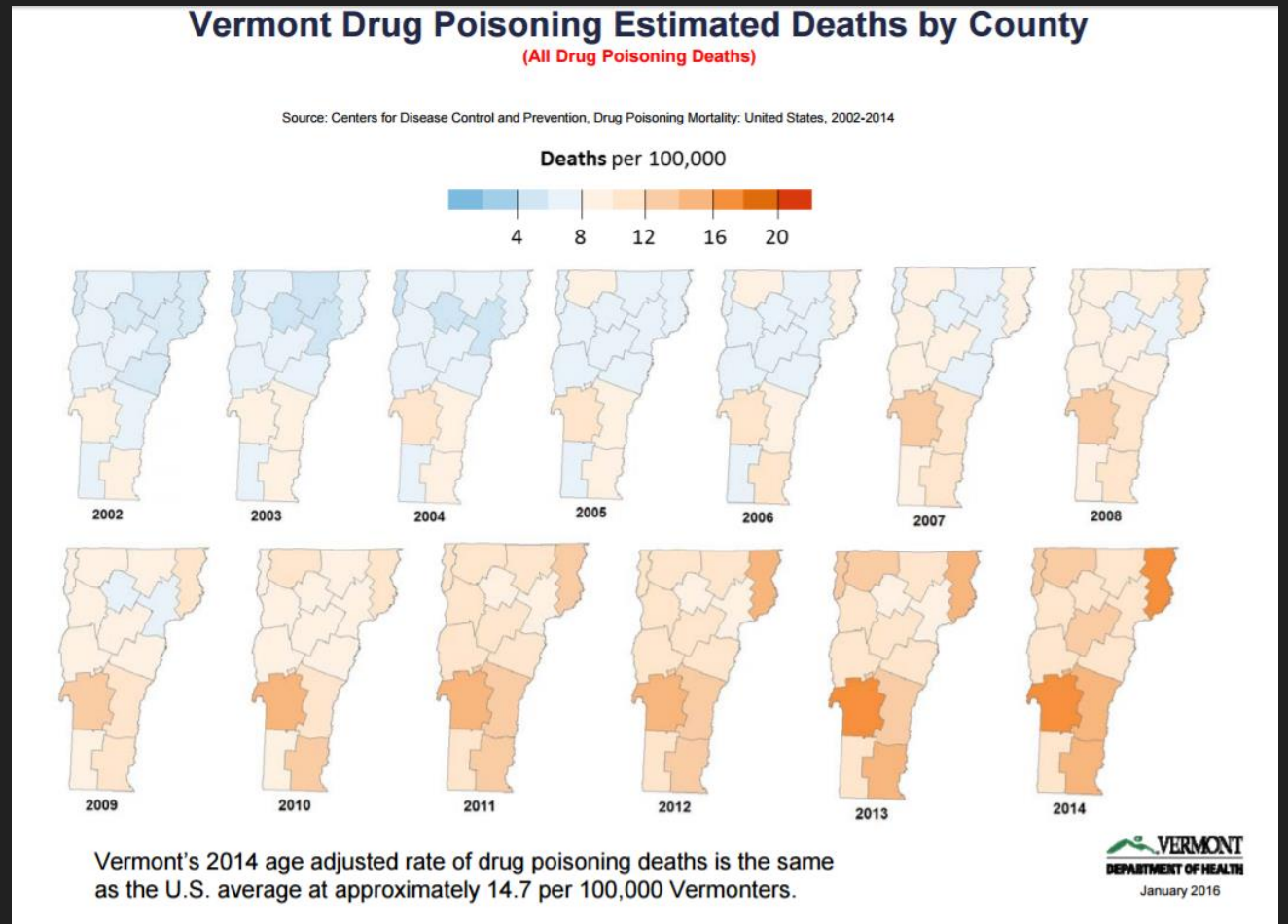


Figure References: Left(4), Right(5)

# Narrowing the Problem:

Rutland County has a high number of drug related deaths. Specifically for opioid related deaths, preliminary data for 2015 from the Vermont Vital Statistics System showed there were 14 opioid related deaths in Rutland County compared to 20 in Chittenden County (5). While Chittenden County's population is about 2.5 times greater than the population of Rutland County, Rutland County's opioid related deaths numbered greater than half of those in Chittenden County. This suggests there is a higher prevalence of opioid use in this region.



# Narrowing the Problem:

The number of people in treatment for opioid use disorder is also increasing. In Rutland county, the number has tripled from 253 to 773 in the 5 years (6).

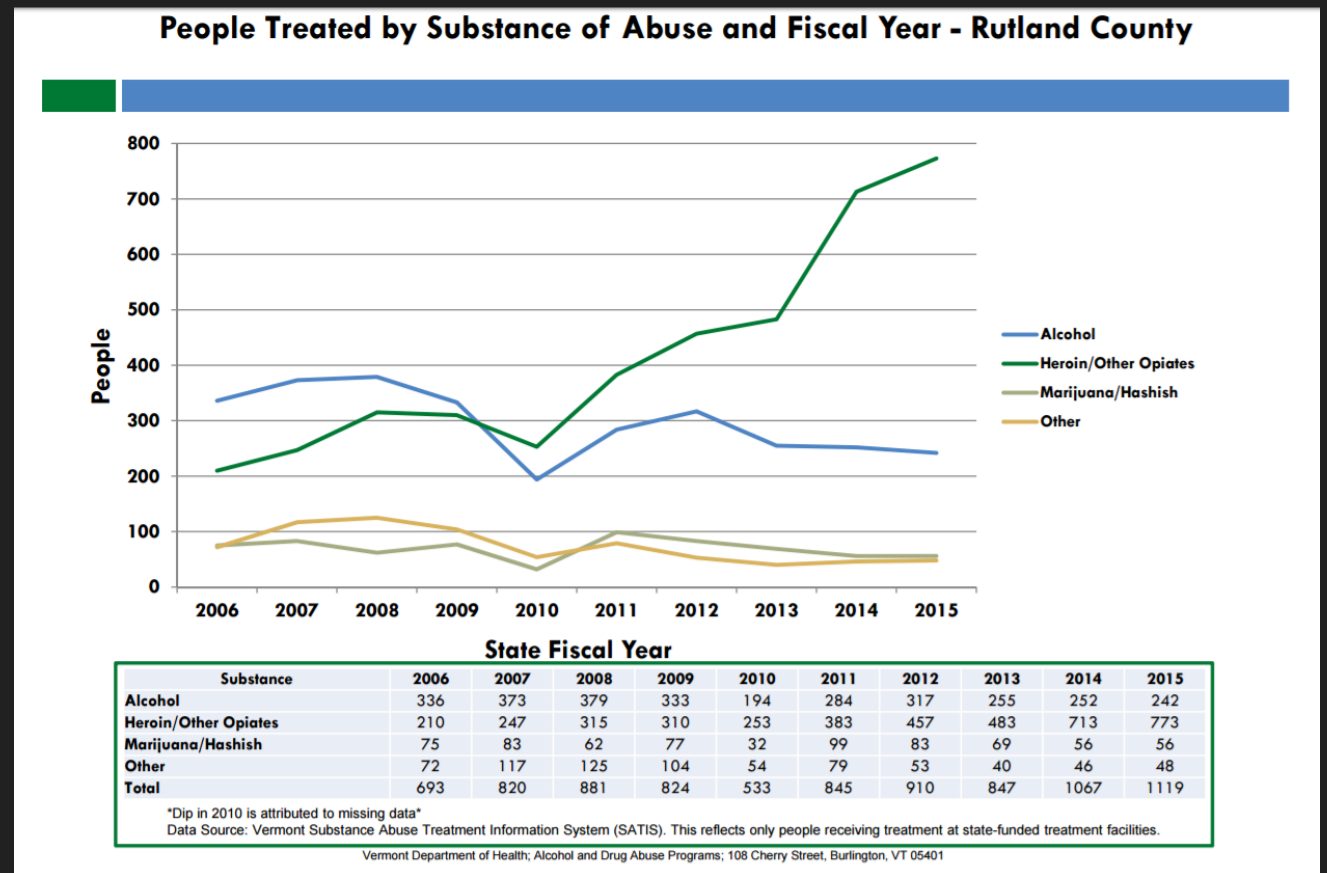


Figure reference (6)

# Public Health Cost:

- According to the CDC, the public health cost of opioid misuse in the USA is 78.5 Billion based on data from 2013 (7).
- 1/3 of this estimate is related to increased health care costs and treatment programs (7).
- Vermont is working towards decreasing these costs through the Hub and Spoke program which has been shown to decrease health care costs in Medicaid patients with opioid use disorders (8).



# Community Perspective:

- Tracie Hauck, Turning Point Center of Rutland
  - The Turning Point Center functions as a place for people in recovery from all addictions to come for support and well being.
  - Oftentimes, people begin using illegal substances at a young age before they have had the chance to learn life skills. Once they have achieved sobriety for a couple of weeks, many expect that the difficult part is over and it will be easy to reintegrate into the community. They are surprised to find that they need to relearn life skills, have social support to mend relationships, seek transportation assistance, and learn job skills. The Turning Point has a mentor program that seeks to support people newly in recovery in their abstinence as well as every other aspect of their lives. Tracie summed this up well by saying, "They deserve more than just putting down the substance."
  - There are few members of the community that aren't touched in some way by substance misuse. However, people are reluctant to talk about substance use and are often embarrassed by people with substance use disorder. Tracie shared her thoughts, "We need to open the conversation and talk about this like it is commonplace, because it is... We need to show that there is no shame and no judgment."
- Sue Gage, Brandon Cares
  - Brandon Cares was formed by several community members out of desire to make a change in the local community after viewing the film *The Hungry Heart*. This film follows the story of a Vermont physician in his treatment of people of opioid use disorder.
  - Since then, they have been involved with multiple local organizations to provide resources to the community and have opened up the conversation about substance use disorders. Most recently, the local schools in the area have required students to read the book *The Seventh Wish*, a story about a child with an older sibling who struggles with addiction. The students will attend a community dialogue night after reading the book to discuss this topic.

# Intervention and Methodology:

- Project goals:
  - Inform the public of the current opioid epidemic in Rutland County
  - Encourage people to seek assistance for opioid use disorder
  - Educate people on resources
  - Encourage the public to open the conversation on this topic
- Plan:
  - Create an informational poster to place in the Brandon Medical Center's waiting room
  - Poster content and design will be developed with input from two local organizations – Brandon Cares and The Turning Point Center of Rutland County.
  - Provide resource sheets developed by Rick Carrick for the UVM LCOM family medicine clerkship



# Results:

- Tracie Hauck of Turning Point Center of Rutland and Sue Gage of Brandon Cares were consulted on poster content.
- Poster was placed in Brandon Medical Center's waiting room.

we're in the middle of an  
**EPIDEMIC**



In 2015, 2.9% of Vermonters reported misuse of a prescription pain medication.



Heroin use in Vermont has more than doubled since 2012.



Rutland County has one of the highest rates of drug related deaths in Vermont.

Vermont is leading the way in treatment for opioid use disorder.  
1.4% of Vermonters are currently receiving treatment for opioid dependence.

“This affects **OUR** community”  
– Sue Gage, Brandon Cares

“**WE** have to make the choice to make a change”  
–Tracie Hauck, Turning Point Center of Rutland

If you or someone you know needs help: visit [healthvermont.gov](http://healthvermont.gov), call Vermont 211, visit your local Turning Point Center, or talk to your doctor

References include: Vermont, J. 2015. "Vermont Drug Abuse Statistics 2015-2017." Vermont Department of Health, Office of Health Statistics, The Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs, 2015. "2014 Vermont Drug Abuse Treatment Centers and Mail-Order." Vermont Department of Health, The Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs, 2015. "Substitution Abuse & Dependence in Vermont." Vermont, July 2017. Vermont Department of Health.

# Evaluation of Effectiveness:

- To evaluate effectiveness:
  - Brandon Medical Center providers could ask patients thoughts on the poster and open the dialogue about opioid use disorders
  - Patients could be provided with a short questionnaire to assess their knowledge and how the poster assisted in increasing this
  - Comment cards could be provided below the poster for patients to leave their opinions
  - Patients could be randomly selected and called to survey their knowledge of opioid use and if the poster contributed to this
- Limitations:
  - Only available to the population at Brandon Medical Center
  - Relies on ability to read
  - Only available in English

# Future Recommendations:

- This poster only targets a subpopulation of Rutland County based on its location. To increase the number of people reached, posters could be placed in more offices throughout Rutland County.
- Based on response to poster, informational sessions could be implemented such as community meetings, open dialogue nights, or small group educational sessions.
- For patients who do not speak English, handouts could be translated and provided for more information.

# References:

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