



Pathology/Biology Section - 2016

H41 The Prevalence of Paraphernalia Found at the Scene of Drug-Related Deaths

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the prevalence of drug paraphernalia found at the scene of drug-related deaths and at the scene of deaths caused specifically by heroin, cocaine, or heroin and cocaine toxicity or abuse.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing objective data to support long-held beliefs that drug-related deaths and deaths caused specifically by heroin, cocaine, or heroin and cocaine toxicity or abuse are characterized by the presence of drug paraphernalia at the scene.

Despite the recent attention given to designer drugs, heroin and cocaine continue to be popular among recreational drug users and many drug-related deaths are attributable to heroin and/or cocaine use. The use of heroin and/or cocaine often involves paraphernalia such as needles and syringes, pipes, spoons, et cetera. Recent recreational drug use is strongly suspected when a body is found with nearby drug paraphernalia. The presence of drug paraphernalia may assist and direct toxicological examination and deaths may be classified as drug-related even if the drug is not present in the toxicological examination.

In this study, deaths reported to the Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office (BCMEO) between August 2010 and December 2014 that were drug-related and in which a scene investigation occurred were identified. A total of 815 cases were identified of which 814 indicated the presence or absence of drug paraphernalia. Of the drug-related cases, 194 (24%) had drug paraphernalia found at the scene. The 815 drug-related cases were further scrutinized and limited to cases where the direct cause of death was heroin, cocaine, or heroin and cocaine intoxication or abuse. These cases accounted for 325 deaths, of which 122 (38%) had drug paraphernalia found at the scene. Heroin intoxication accounted for 162 deaths, of which 75 (46%) had drug paraphernalia found at the scene. Heroin intoxication or abuse accounted for 162 deaths, of which 75 (46%) had drug paraphernalia found at the scene. Cocaine intoxication or abuse accounted for 97 deaths, of which 21 (22%) had drug paraphernalia found at the scene. Heroin and cocaine intoxication or abuse accounted for 66 deaths, of which 26 (39%) had drug paraphernalia found at the scene.

In conclusion, this study provides objective data regarding the prevalence of drug paraphernalia found at the scene of drug-related deaths. As in previous studies, drug paraphernalia is found in only a minority of drug-related deaths (24%). Death due directly to cocaine intoxication showed a similar trend with drug paraphernalia found in 22% of these cases. Deaths due directly to heroin toxicity had paraphernalia present in almost half of scenes investigated (46%).

Cocaine, Heroin, Paraphernalia