Fentanyl - Opioid addiction, part 6

Fentanyl is a very powerful synthetic opioid. Fentanyl is approved by the FDA for treating severe pain. It can be made legally as a prescription drug, or illegally in an underground lab.

Fentanyl is sometimes used to treat patients with chronic pain, which is pain that lasts for a long time. Often, these patients no longer get relief from other opioids. Prescription fentanyl is known by such names as Actiq, Duragesic, and Sublimaze. When prescribed by a physician, it is often given by injection, skin patch, or as a pill that dissolves in the mouth.

Most recent cases of fentanyl-related harm, overdose, and death in the U.S. are linked to illegally made fentanyl. It is sold for its heroin-like effect. This illegal fentanyl is sold as a powder or soaked onto blotter paper. It is also mixed with or substituted for heroin. Sometimes it is made into tablets that look like other, less powerful drugs.

People can swallow, snort, or inject fentanyl. Users can put the blotter paper in their mouth so that fentanyl is absorbed through the moist tissues of the mouth. Like heroin, morphine, and other opioid drugs, fentanyl affects areas of the brain that control pain and emotions.

Fentanyl has many side effects, including sleepiness, nausea, confusion, constipation, slowed breathing, unconsciousness, coma, and death. Since fentanyl is so powerful, the risk of overdose is great. Fentanyl is especially dangerous to drug users if it is combined with other drugs. Fentanyl sold on the street can be mixed with heroin or cocaine. This greatly increases both its strength and danger.

A new fentanyl-like drug called carfentanil is sold as heroin, but it is much stronger. This synthetic-opioid is 100 times more powerful than fentanyl. Carfentanil overdoses are common. Even a very small amount that is swallowed or absorbed through the skin can be fatal.
**Naloxone** is a safe and effective medication to use in opioid-related overdoses, including heroin and fentanyl. Naloxone is available under the brand names of Narcan and Evzio. It reverses the effects of opioids and is a critical medication in preventing fatal opioid overdoses.

People and their family members who are dealing with mental or substance use disorders, or both, can call the National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357. This is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service. It is available in English and Spanish. The National Helpline provides referrals to local treatment centers, support groups, and community-based organizations. Callers can also order free brochures and other information.