

Xylazine as a Complication to Wound Care

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Objective:

This paper will familiarize attendees with the adulterant xylazine, discuss the origins of xylazine use in the United States, show xylazine's impact on wounds and wound care, and explore xylazine's association with necrotic skin ulcers.

Methods:

A review of current literature on the history of xylazine shows that it first appeared in Puerto Rico in 2001 as a veterinary anesthetic for large animals, such as horses and cattle. It was identified in the United States as early as 2006 in fatal overdoses, as it was combined with either heroin or fentanyl. Xylazine has severe physical and psychological effects on those who use it, oftentimes unbeknownst to those individuals. 48 out of 50 states and Washington, DC report drug overdose deaths related to the adulterant xylazine when combined with heroin and/or fentanyl. When combined with fentanyl, xylazine prolongs the short acting effects of fentanyl, enhances euphoria and analgesia, and reduces injection frequency.

Xylazine has been reported to cause painful denovo skin ulcers. These wounds worsen quickly and appear spontaneously and unplanned.

Results:

Currently, xylazine is the most common adulterant to the illegal drug supply. 25% of drug samples in NYC tested positive for xylazine, although the actual saturation is believed to be higher.

Xylazine has been reported to cause painful denovo skin ulcers that appear spontaneously and unplanned. Xylazine can cause pressure sores from patients lying in a single position for hours. These wounds putrefy quickly, decompose, and decay with necrotic eschars and marginalized epibolic formation. Amputation is often necessary.

Conclusion:

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that COVID-19 is responsible for 3 million deaths world-wide, 1.2 million of those occurring in the United States. Compare that number to the number of people battling a substance abuse disorder, 46.8 million, a 267% increase since 2019. It could be said that the scourge of drug addiction can be seen as a more rampant epidemic than that of COVID. Drug overdoses have claimed more lives than that of AIDS. Xylazine is an emerging danger to public health in the United States. Something must be done to halt this epidemic before it worsens.