

# Assessing Occupational Opioid Exposure at the Cincinnati, OH VA Medical Center

American Federal Government Employees (AFGE), International Chemical Workers Union Council (ICWUC), National Nurses United (NNU), University of Cincinnati (UC)

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# Background of Problem

🕒 NOVEMBER 1, 2018

Fentanyl Law Enforcement Submissions and Increases in  
Syr

**Opioid use often persists in workers'**

201  
○ NSC: 75% of employers say their workplace  
W has been impacted by opioid crisis

Fahr  
Of  
CO  
March 27, 2019     

August 27  
give **Drug overdoses fastest-growing cause of workplace  
fatalities, highlighting heroin epidemic**

Posta... members... safety... measures... address... exposure... **investigating had to be**

by **Claire Brownell** Mar 8, 2019

# Objectives

## What We Set to Accomplish

- Create a systematic method of identifying increased workplace hazards to opioids and related drugs
- Administer surveys, hold interviews and focus groups with AFGE members working in the hospital
- Based on input from a VA researcher we focused on completing “first leg” of research as “quality improvement.”

## Personal Goals

- Explore Cincinnati
- Try new restaurants

# Challenges

- Timeline associated with IRB approval
- Many local key-players with low levels of communication
- Difficulty gaining access for interviews or conducting surveys
- Waiting for government badges to have clearance and credibility as interns
- Difficulty disseminating information about focus groups to hospital employees
- Due to the busy nature of a hospital workplace, very few employees showed up to focus groups.
- “Witch Hunt”

# Methods

1. Extensive literature
2. Identify target population
3. Develop talking points/questions for focus group
4. Pilot questions with union office employees
5. Invite all employees to participate in focus groups
6. Transcribe common attitudes among VA employees.
7. Thematically analyze results
8. Develop suggestions for future research



The poster is a blue-bordered flyer with a white background. At the top, it features logos for the VA (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs), National Nurses United, and AFGE. The main title is "Focus Group Participants Wanted" in bold black text, with the subtitle "Join The Conversation To Make A Difference" below it. The poster is divided into sections: "WHO" (Occupational Health Internship Program Partnering With The Cincinnati VA Medical Center, American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), International Chemical Workers Union (ICWUC), and University Of Cincinnati), "WHAT" (Employees Of The Cincinnati VA Medical Center Will Engage In An Open Discussion About Exposure To Opioids (e.g. Fentanyl) In The Workplace. Complete Confidentiality Is Guaranteed.), and "WHEN & WHERE" (All Focus Groups Will Be Held In The Learning Exchange Located On The 3rd Floor. Dates and times are listed below.). At the bottom, it says "RSVP is encouraged to ensure ample food and beverages but not required. Please RSVP at MELESSE2@ILLINOIS.EDU or (513)-278-3223 with the date and time you'd like to attend." and "ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A \$50 GIFT CARD" with "FOOD & BEVERAGES PROVIDED" and the University of Cincinnati logo.

**VA** U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

**National Nurses United**

**AFGE**

## Focus Group Participants Wanted

*Join The Conversation To Make A Difference*

**WHO**  
Occupational Health Internship Program Partnering With The Cincinnati VA Medical Center, American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), International Chemical Workers Union (ICWUC), And University Of Cincinnati.

**WHAT**  
Employees Of The Cincinnati VA Medical Center Will Engage In An Open Discussion About Exposure To Opioids (e.g. Fentanyl) In The Workplace. Complete Confidentiality Is Guaranteed.

**WHEN & WHERE**  
All Focus Groups Will Be Held In The Learning Exchange Located On The 3rd Floor. Dates and times are listed below.

RSVP is encouraged to ensure ample food and beverages but not required. Please RSVP at [MELESSE2@ILLINOIS.EDU](mailto:MELESSE2@ILLINOIS.EDU) or (513)-278-3223 with the date and time you'd like to attend.

ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A \$50 GIFT CARD  
FOOD & BEVERAGES PROVIDED

University of CINCINNATI

# Results

From employee accounts, we noticed a few common themes regarding exposure concerns.

- Most employees are not Narcan trained/do not have quick access to Narcan if needed.
- Nursing and Social Work are departments with little-to-no literature and high risk of exposure.

The final product will include a “give back” to the VA/AFGE as well as ICWUC. To the VA/AFGE we will include a research paper and IRB proposal so that the research department may continue looking into this topic. We will provide the ICWUC content suggestions for a potential Opioid Exposure Safety Training.

# Results: Personal Goals



**HARU**  
KOREAN RESTAURANT



**HARU**  
KOREAN RESTAURANT



# NIOSH Conference at the CDC

Thank you Rebecca Reindel and Kathy Kirkland for this opportunity!

We were able to experience first-hand the process of professionals brainstorming potential avenues of addressing research gaps related to opioid use after occupational injury/exposure.

During this time, we were also in a position to network with individuals from workers' compensation, public health, government, and academia.

We are so grateful to have been able to take part in such a relevant discussion!





# Successes

- Plenty of time for literature review given delays with IRB and such
- Networked with many individuals who could positively influence future studies/career
- Gained positive experiences in the field of occupational health
- Had incredibly supportive key-players who made sure we were well accommodated
- Attended chemical hazards training at ICWUC and NIOSH conference for supplemental education
- Diligently explored a pressing public health issue
- Workers opened up easily about sensitive subject

# Recommendations

In the case that the VAMC or any other federal organization will be a site for future OHIP interns

- Interns should start the employee application process as soon as possible.
- For any advertising of focus groups/interviews, speak to Public Affairs or similar department.
- For VAMC as a site: Interns should introduce themselves to the Chief in every department.
- For VAMC as a site: The Board of Directors meet frequently throughout the week. Try to make an announcement at one of their meetings.

Will include report of suggestions for future OHIP interns in final report.

# Personal Reflections

## Yared

- Exploring a unique avenue of Public Health
- Working with people from various fields
- “Bloody Pocket”
- Communications is key



## Liana

- Seeing through an occupational lens
- Working hands-on in public health
- Networking opportunities
- New city/environment
- Mental development

# Acknowledgements

## NIOSH

## AOEC

- Katherine Kirkland, DrPH, MPH, Executive Director of AOEC
- Ingrid Denis, MA, LMSW

## NCOSH

## AFGE

- Charles Smith, 2031 President
- Pat Moore, 2031 AFGE Health and Safety Representative
- Milly Rodriguez, AFGE National Office Health and Safety Specialist

## ICWUC

- John Morawetz

## NNU

- Sadie Hughes, APRN, NNU President

## UC

- Glenn Talaska, Director of the Department of Environmental Health

## VAMC

- Dr. Kate Chard, Associate Chief of Staff/Research VAMC
- VAMC Employees



And of course... Our Veterans!