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WV Overdose Patients Spurned Heroin Rehab Referrals

By Crime and Justice News | August 1, 2017

In five hours last August in Cabell County, W.Va., 26 drug overdoses were reported after a batch of heroin laced with fentanyl and an elephant sedative was sold in the region. A follow-up study of the outbreak indicates 20 overdose patients were treated at hospital emergency departments, where 12 patients left against medical advice.

And [the Charleston Gazette-Mail reports](http://www.wvgazette.com/news/20170729/26-overdoses-over-5-hours-in-one-town-but-nobody-got-referred-to-treatment)

<http://www.wvgazette.com/news/20170729/26-overdoses-over-5-hours-in-one-town-but-nobody-got-referred-to-treatment>) that none of them were referred for treatment for the underlying problem: drug addiction. The state report highlights a frustration among emergency responders who say they're treating the same overdose patients, sometimes more than once in a day, and raises questions about how best to get patients into treatment after they overdose.

"We can build all the beds we want, but we've got to get them into treatment," said Dr. Rahul Gupta, West Virginia's public health commissioner. "No one is more at risk than those who overdose." Gordon Merry, director of Cabell County EMS, said his agency responds to an average of 20 overdoses each week. When most patients are revived with naloxone or a bag-valve mask, they get up and leave instead of being taken to a hospital, Merry said. He said "very, very few, if any" of the overdose patients go into substance abuse treatment. He called the practice of saving lives without dealing with the underlying problem like "putting a Band-Aid on a major bleed."