

## With New Overdose Profile, NOPE Task Force and Partners Set to Battle Pills Abuse

By Leon Fooksman

He was a 39-year-old white man. He had a high school education. He often worked in construction or sales. He had a history of drug abuse. He was a patient of a pain management clinic.

That's the profile of a typical person who has died of a drug overdose in Palm Beach County, Fla. -- and likely many other parts of the country, according to new research by Gary Martin, a detective and psychotherapist who analyzed 207 overdose deaths in Palm Beach County in 2007 and 2008.

There are many other striking similarities between those who died of overdoses.

The average decedent's friends and family knew of his drug habit, and some were present when he was found unconscious. He passed away at home of multiple drug toxicity, usually of a combination of oxycodone, cocaine or methadone. He died accidentally.



Martin said he hopes the new profile can shed stereotypes about overdose deaths.

"The people who are dying the most from drugs aren't the junkies on the streets. They're not youths who use intravenous drugs," said Martin, a member of NOPE Task Force.

Rather, Martin said, "It's your mailman. It's your carpenter. It's your brother and husband. It's the people in all our lives."

Across the country, drugs killed more than 33,000 people in 2005, making it the second leading cause of accidental death, behind only motor vehicle accidents and ahead of firearms deaths, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Even more disturbing, overdose deaths spiked significantly in the past 25 years. Some 10,000 died of overdoses in 1990. That figure hit 20,000 in 1999.

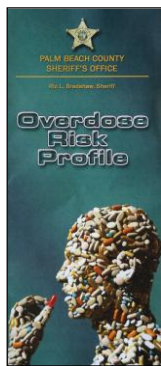
"Prescription drugs are the culprits, the perpetrators," said Martin, an overdose death detective at the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office and associate dean for student wellness at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Fla.

Middle-aged Americans are dying in the highest numbers, mostly from a mix of opiate pain medications with other drugs, studies show.

Public awareness and education are necessary components to prevent future tragedies, states Karen Perry, Executive Director of Narcotic Overdose Prevention and Education (NOPE). In Florida, NOPE Task Force is working with Martin and health and social services agencies to create a multimedia public service campaign focused on the new overdose risk profile and on the abuse and misuse of prescription drugs.

“The key value of this new research is that we now know who we need to target and when and where to target them,” said Jim Hall, director of Center for the Study and Prevention of Substance Abuse at Nova Southeastern University.

“In too many communities, this issue has been ignored,” Hall added.



Martin began tracking data on overdose deaths after law enforcement agencies in his area realized more community outreach was needed to combat the growing problem. Not enough people, Martin said, know the hazards associated with combining commonly used pharmaceuticals like oxycodone, hydrocodone and alprazolam with illicit drugs such as heroine and cocaine.

“I’m hoping this profile will give us a new approach.” Says Martin, “If more people understand this profile, there could be more opportunities to help their friends and family.”

*To download a copy of the Overdose Risk Profile brochure, go to:  
[www.pbso.org/documents/OverdoseRiskProfileBrochure.pdf](http://www.pbso.org/documents/OverdoseRiskProfileBrochure.pdf)*

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