

# *ILLICIT USE OF FENTANYL PATCHES IN RURAL AUSTRALIA*

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Lyndon Community

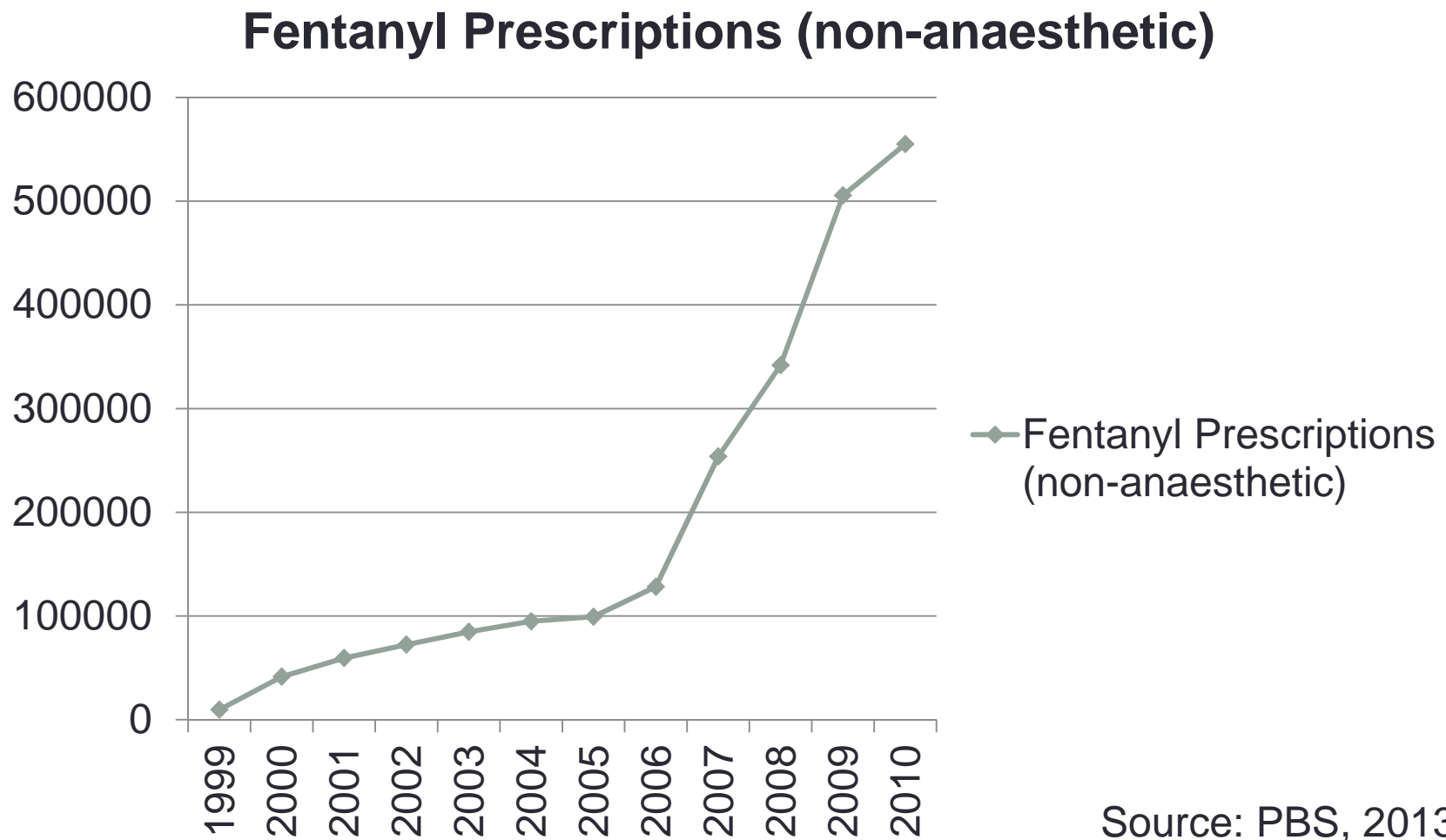
Orange, NSW, Australia



# Why?

- The study aimed to investigate how and why people use fentanyl for non-medical reasons in rural NSW, Australia and; to identify strategies that may mitigate risks and associated harms.

# Fentanyl



# Misuse of fentanyl





Do you know what **OTP** means?

Opioid Treatment Program



Drug Withdrawal

- Must have used fentanyl for non-medical purposes on more than one occasion
- Usually reside in a rural area of NSW or Victoria
- Be over 18 years of age, and;
- Be English speaking

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SAVING LIVES SINCE

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84



Sex		Living circumstances		Cultural background	
M	8	Regularly housed	8	Non Indigenous	9
F	4	Homeless	4	Aboriginal	3
Preferred drug		Main source of income		Current Drug treatment	
Fentanyl	4	Unemployment benefits	6	Residential Withdrawal	5
Heroin	6	Parenting benefits	3	Opioid Treatment	5
Poly substances	1	Full-time employment	2	Residential Rehab	1
Methamphetamines	1	Disability payments	1	Community support	1
Region of usual residence			Age		
Murrumbidgee/Victoria			5	Age range	24-55
Western NSW			5	Mean age	35
New England			2		

# Narrative analysis of fentanyl use



# Obtaining fentanyl

- **Q: How would you usually get a hold of it?**
- **A:** Buy it off the street just through dealers that get it wherever they get it from...I think they buy it off other people that are prescribed it, that's what I'm aware of anyway. There's a big market for it, yeah, a big market. — Tammy
- It just depends how gullible the doctor is or how much time he's got. They don't even ask you really why you're there to get it, it's more the concern of what drugs you want, it's not what the problem is - Ryan

# Using fentanyl

- Cook it – add an acid (vinegar or lemon juice)  
add water, boil it

How much vinegar and water?

Vinegar	Water
0.5 ml	1.0 ml
0.25 ml	5.0 ml
0.6 ml	0.6 ml
1.0 ml	2.0 ml

*If you punch holes in the quarter it brings the morphine out a bit more – Paul*

*I think there's only one little area that's actually got the drug in it.*  
*I'm not sure but, some people were getting sold parts of the patch that weren't doing anything - Ryan*



## Choosing fentanyl

- Because I'm on a 100ml of Methadone, the first time I had fentanyl I actually got really, really stoned, so it was a good feeling that something had finally been able to make me stoned while on the Methadone, and it had that clean Heroin type of taste down my throat and all that, so yeah it was a good feeling. – Jason
- If I get really depressed I'll go and get Duragesic fentanyl, I know what it's going to do but it's the only thing that, to me now, because I've got quite a high tolerance that I can actually feel... It's a long way to drive just to – that's an hour and a half there and an hour and a half back, that's three hours out of your day spent feeling normal, trying to feel normal. – Karen

## Price

- I would pay \$200 for a 100ml patch, you can then cut it up into \$500 to \$600 worth of pieces, which is 10 to 12 pieces, \$50 each. A \$50 piece is enough per person... So, where it would take \$200 worth of Heroin to get one good hit, for \$50 of fentanyl you get one great hit, a second not so great hit, and a third hit that stops the cravings, for 50. – Jarrad
- A lot of people do the patches but you're paying between \$200 and \$300 for a patch, for 100ml patch, and not a lot of people can afford that, so you'll see them swing back more towards OxyContin because they're cheaper of course. – Ryan

# Problems

- but now it's got to where I need a patch a day, so that's \$100 a day. So if it hadn't been for my partner and that I wouldn't be able to afford that, but we're sick of going around in circles, I spent her money, and then I spend all my money and then I spend all her money, so we just end up with nothing so that's what brought me here [to detox].  
– Troy
- Since the fentanyl come out I've been sharing needles all the time, just because if I don't have money and I need that hit, or if I do have money and I can't get that fentanyl I would use someone else's spoon they've double dipped in, or I would even use their dirty needles, that's how strong the hold is that it has on you. – Jarrad

# Overdose

- **Q: How many people would you know that have overdosed from it?**
- **A:** Well I know I've seen three or maybe four people in the last 12 or so months, one person twice. I actually had one mate die at just at Christmas time. That was my best mate. – Jason
- **A:** I know of two, and myself... Over probably a two year period. I don't know, maybe a year and a half. – Liam
- **Q: How many people do you reckon you've known who have died from using the patches?**
- **A:** My missus, two cousins... about five of them. Paul

# Myths and facts

User beliefs	Facts
Narcan wont work on a fentanyl overdose	Two or three doses needed because of product used by NSW Ambulance
Fentanyl is in between the glue of the patch and the plastic coating	Fentanyl is in the glue – drug in adhesive
there's only one little area [of the patch] that's actually got the drug in it.	Fentanyl is dispersed equally throughout the patch
if you <u>punch holes in the quarter it brings the morphine out a bit more</u>	Holes not required The drug is not morphine
if you bend that patch it will <u>automatically let all of it release</u>	The patch is designed to be flexible
<u>the bubbles are really the one thing that draw the Fentanyl out</u> of the patch, but you have to keep pressure on the top of it	The major factors affecting the solubility of a drug are temperature, the solvent polarity and the pH of the solvent (Williams & Lemke, 2002, pg 45). Bubbles = temperature

User beliefs	Facts
Vinegar causes your veins to harden	IV injection causes sclerosis (hardening) of the veins, regardless of the injected substance
The vinegar is still active by the time you're putting it into your veins so it's <u>actually thickening your blood</u> and giving you blood clots	No information about vinegar causing thrombosis
Because when you're cooking it on the stove you lose a lot [of the drug] in evaporation	Given the very high boiling point and low vapour pressure of fentanyl, it is highly unlikely that significant amounts of fentanyl would be lost in evaporation (Gupta, Ganesan, Gutch, Manral & Dubey, 2008)
You've got a big enough habit and you go cold turkey you're go into fits, <u>you'll go into convulsions</u> straight away,	Convulsions are not a feature of opioid withdrawal, though may be a feature of poly-drug withdrawal, especially when benzodiazepines and/or alcohol are involved (Kosten & O'Connor, 2003)

# Peer education required

- They just said, “This is how you do it,” and I just done it myself... That’s all I’ve heard, yeah. Yeah, that’s all, and these guys have been on it the whole time, so no one has ever told me any different. – Lee
- **Q: Have you ever looked on the internet or anything like that about it?**
- **A:** I did once, and there were so many different sorts of fentanyl patches or different ways that they were saying to draw it out, but I just went with what knew - Tammy

# Participants injecting drug use history

	Mean	Range
Age at time of interview	35	24 - 55
Age when first used opioids	17	14 - 23
# of years since first use of opioids	15	6 - 23
# of years since first using fentanyl	4	1 - 5

# Recommendations

- Peer education program delivered via rural needle and syringe programs, withdrawal unit and community-based drug and alcohol workers
  - Drug information
  - Safer use suggestions
  - Resuscitation techniques
- Health worker education program – including GPs, drug and alcohol workers and ambulance service



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