

Transborder trafficking of prescription opioids in Canada and the United States

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Introduction

- Abuse of prescription opioids is a significant public health concern in both Canada and the United States (US).
- Approaches enacted to prevent prescription opioid abuse in both countries include the introduction of tamper-resistant formulations, which make use via unintended routes of administration more difficult.
- Different opioid products, including those with and without abuse deterrent formulations, are available for prescription in Canada and the US.
- Cross-border trafficking of opioids unavailable in one country is one way individuals may continue to obtain, and potentially abuse, prescription opioids despite efforts to prevent abuse.

Aims

This study uses data collected from two surveillance programs to examine the extent of cross-border trafficking of prescription opioids intended for sale in Canada and the US.

Methods

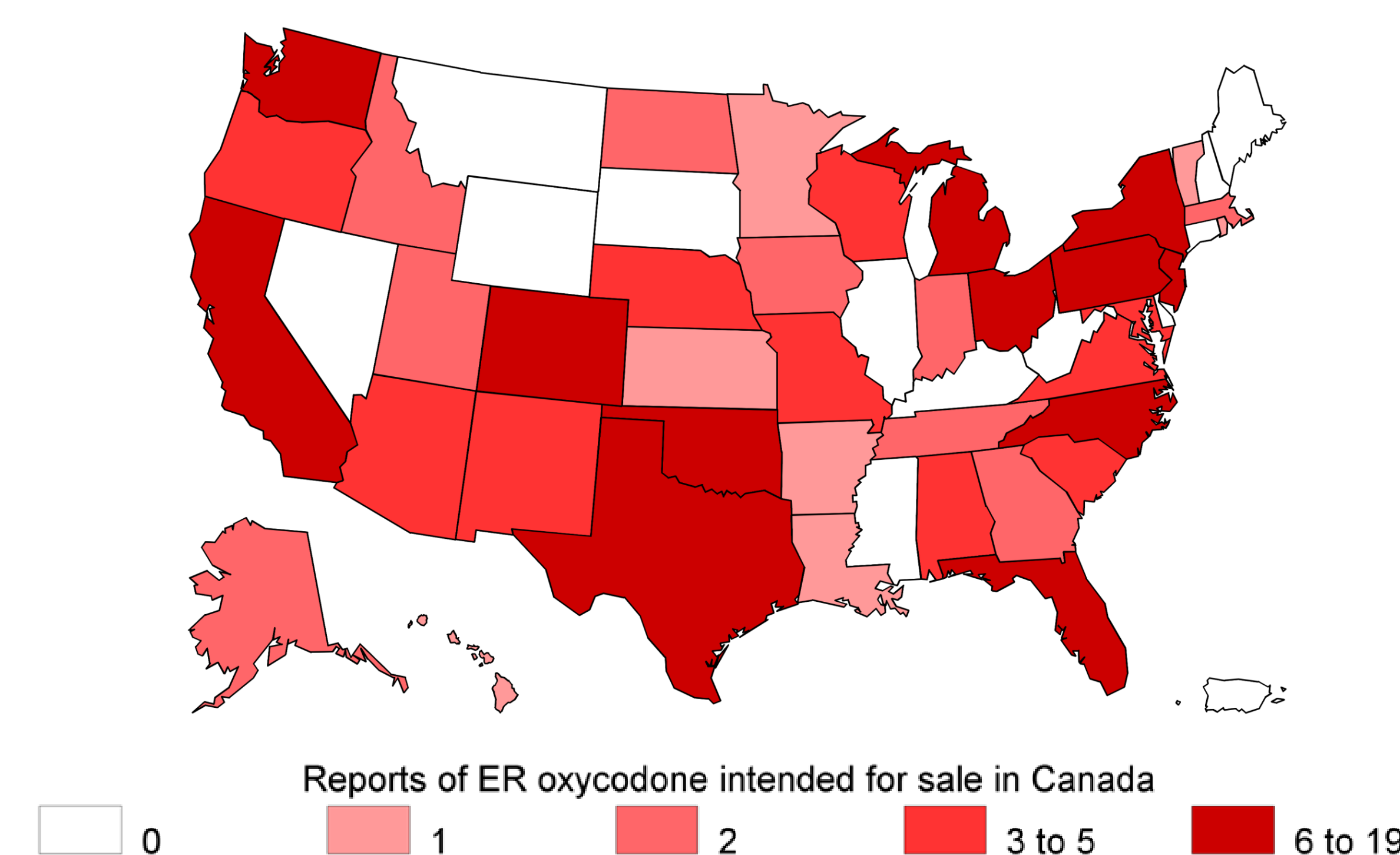
- Reports from two surveillance programs were analyzed:
 - The **StreetRx® Program** collects data from publicly available, country specific websites that use crowdsourcing to assess the street price of prescription and illicit drugs.
 - The **Researchers and Participants Interacting Directly (RAPID) Program** collects data via a survey administered to a sample of treatment-seeking individuals in the US who are dependent on opioids.
- Cross-border trafficking into Canada was assessed using reports of oxymorphone, which is not available for prescription in Canada.
- Cross-border trafficking into the US was assessed using reports of extended release (ER) oxycodone products intended for sale in Canada and not available for prescription in the US.

Results

Figure 1
The StreetRx Program
Reports of **oxymorphone**
by province
June 2012 to October 2014



Figure 2
The StreetRx Program
Reports of **ER oxycodone** intended for sale in Canada
by state
June 2012 to October 2014



StreetRx Program

- In the Canadian StreetRx Program there were two reports of oxymorphone between June 2012 and October 2014. Figure 1 displays the provinces where prices were reported.
- In the US StreetRx Program, 173 ER oxycodone products from Canada were reported (169 for crushable ER oxycodone and 4 for tamper resistant). The location of reports is shown in Figure 2 by state. These reports accounted for 7% of ER oxycodone price reports in the US.
- The median price per milligram was \$1.00 USD for the crushable formulation, \$0.60 USD for the tamper-resistant formulation.

RAPID Program

- In the RAPID Program, the most frequently reported product from Canada that was either obtained or used was OxyContin®/OxyNEO®, 22 of 256 (9%) respondents. Codeine was the second highest drug product reported with 4 (2%) respondents.

Conclusions

- Illicit trade of prescription opioids across the border between Canada and the US does exist.
- Reports for Canadian ER oxycodone products do not appear to be concentrated in any particular area.
- Further research is needed to examine the extent to which this illicit trade persists and changes, particularly in response to efforts in both countries to limit prescription opioid abuse.



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